

Library School Oral History Series

Fay M. Blake

INFORMATION FOR ALL: AN ACTIVIST LIBRARIAN AND LIBRARY EDUCATOR
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, 1961-1984

With an Introduction by
Anne G. Lipow

Interviews Conducted by
Laura McCreery
in 2000

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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Fay M. Blake and H. Morton Newman, 2000.

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BLAKE, Fay M. (b. 1920)

Librarian

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Early life and political upbringing in New York City; Hunter College, 1936-1940; American Student Union and Young Communist League; political interests and activism in southern California during WWII; working and attending the library school at the University of Southern California, 1956-1961; UCLA acquisitions department's gifts and exchange program, 1961-1970; Lawrence Clark Powell and the UCLA library; concurrent Ph.D. studies in English literature at UCLA, 1960s; appointment status of University of California librarians; the Librarians Association of the University of California; on the faculty of UC Berkeley's School of Librarianship, 1971-84; developing the school's field studies program; deanships of Patrick Wilson and Michael Buckland; serving on the California State Library board; effects of Proposition 13 on libraries; role of the public library in society; the future of librarianship; ongoing collaborations with H. Morton Newman [husband, present during interviews].

Introduction by Anne Grodzins Lipow, Founder and Director, Library Solutions Institute and Press.

Interviewed 2000 by Laura McCreery for the Library School Oral History Series. The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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Morley S. Farquar, Patron

Class of 1931 Oral History Endowment

Alumni Association of the School of Librarianship and
School of Library and Information Studies

Corliss S. Lee

In Memory of Patricia Anderson Farquar:

John Baleix
Willa K. Baum
Robert L. Briscoe
Irene Frew
Jean E. Herring
Lester Hurd
Jean C. Marks
Rebecca D. McIntyre
Sharon A. Moore
Corinne Rathjens
Marlene B. Riley
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In memory of Fredric J. Mosher:

Ricki A. Blau
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SERIES PREFACE--Library School Oral History Series

The Library School Oral History Series documents the history of librarianship education at the University of California, Berkeley. Through transcribed and edited oral history interviews, the series preserves personal recollections of those involved with Berkeley's graduate library school since the 1930s. In the process, the interviews touch on the history of libraries in the Bay Area and California and on remarkable changes to the profession of librarianship over time.

Certain lines of inquiry are central to all the interviews. What were the changes to the School of Librarianship (later the School of Library and Information Studies) over the years? How were decisions made, and by whom? Historically, what is the proper role of and training for librarians? How has that changed? What, in the opinion of those interviewed, is the public's view of librarianship?

Library education at Berkeley spans nearly a full century. In 1901 Melvil Dewey, founding director of the New York State Library School and author of the Dewey Decimal classification system for books, wrote to University of California President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, encouraging him to start a library school on the West Coast. Berkeley offered the first summer courses in librarianship in 1902, and summer training continued intermittently until 1918, when library education joined the curriculum of the regular academic year.

In 1921, a Department of Librarianship was authorized for the College of Letters and Science, with instruction to begin in 1922. The state library school in Sacramento, which had offered courses since 1914, closed its doors in 1921, turning over the training of librarians to the University of California.

In 1926, Berkeley's departmental program became a separate graduate School of Librarianship, which existed until 1946 under the leadership of the founding dean, Sydney B. Mitchell. In the early years, with a staff of two core faculty members, Edith M. Coulter and Della J. Sisler, Mitchell offered both a graduate Certificate in Librarianship and a second-year course leading to the Master of Arts degree. Generally the school accepted only fifty students each year from among several hundred applicants.

In 1933, under new accreditation standards, the American Library Association named Berkeley a "Type I" school, one of only five so designated because of its graduate degree offerings. In 1937 an endowment grant of \$150,000 from the Carnegie Corporation assured the school's place among American educational institutions.

After World War II, during the deanship of J. Periam Danton (1946-1961), the school grew dramatically in size of faculty and number of students, while expanding and specializing every area of its programs. The graduate certificate was replaced in 1947 with a Bachelor of Library Science degree (BLS) and in 1955 with a Master of Library Science degree (MLS); Ph.D. and Doctor of Library Science (DLS) degree programs were inaugurated in 1954; and the school developed its own Library School Library as a branch of the main Doe Library.

With the deanship of Raynard Coe Swank (1963-1970) came the school's first attention to computers and automation for libraries, an issue which eventually found its way into the curriculum and was taken up also through the school's Institute of Library Research. Swank's leadership culminated in the school's move from its quarters inside Doe Library to the venerable South Hall, one of two original buildings of the Berkeley campus (and the only one remaining). Throughout the seventies and eighties, under the leadership of Patrick Wilson and Michael Buckland, significant changes came to the curriculum and the faculty, as reflected in the eventual change of name to the School of Library and Information Studies.

In the late eighties and nineties, the school and its curricula were evaluated as part of a larger review of the campus and its mission as a research university. The school had only one permanent dean during this period, Robert C. Berring, who served half time from 1986 to 1989. Much of the assessment took place under a series of acting deans. Eventually the School of Library and Information Studies ceased admitting new students, while the campus administration contemplated whether it had a future.

Although the threat of complete dissolution was beaten back, in part owing to the efforts of alumni and their "Save Our School" campaign, the school was, in effect, compelled to close down its operations. It reopened as the School of Information Management and Systems (SIMS), which graduated its first master's students in 1999. Although a few faculty members have remained, the new school's curriculum bears little resemblance to the old, as it offers an electronically based, rather than print-oriented, training. SIMS did take over the library school's endowment and its location in South Hall. As of January 2000, SIMS also administers the alumni association that incorporates graduates of the former school. To date it has not sought accreditation from the American Library Association.

Meanwhile, schools of librarianship across the country have closed, changed their missions, or been subsumed under other graduate schools. The library systems devised so carefully by nineteenth and twentieth century founders have given way--in academic, public, and special libraries of every kind--to new ways of recording and managing collections and providing service to patrons. The Regional Oral History

Office's Library School Oral History Series provides a strong narrative complement to written records of a key educational institution at a crucial time. With traditional education for librarianship fast disappearing, this series, like ROHO's broader University History Series, can serve as an enlightening case study of changes in education occurring throughout the United States.

A significant gift from Morley S. Farquar in memory of his wife, Patricia Anderson Farquar '53, allowed this series to begin in the fall of 1998. Additional gifts from the Class of 1931 Oral History Endowment and the Alumni Association of the former School of Librarianship/Library and Information Studies, along with important individual donations, have further supported the collection of interviews.

A key to creating this series has been the longevity of the individuals selected to be narrators. The first four interviewees for the series were born in 1914 or earlier and were between eighty-five and ninety years old at the time of their interviews. Two of them were students at the school in the 1930s, and their recollections shed light on the founding faculty members. Two of them had substantial experience in California public libraries. Three had long careers on the School of Librarianship faculty. Other narrators in the series will add their experiences as students, faculty members, and deans. Taken together, these oral histories will offer a rich history of librarianship education throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

Special thanks go to the wise and thoughtful team of advisers for the Library School Oral History Series: Michael K. Buckland, Julia J. Cooke, Mary Kay Duggan, Debra L. Hansen, Robert D. Harlan, J. R. K. Kantor (who also proofread every transcript), Corliss S. Lee, and Charlotte Nolan. Special thanks go also to those whose ideas, assistance, and goodwill helped the series come to life: Willa K. Baum, Anne G. Lipow, Christine Orr, Shannon Page, Suzanne Riess, and Leticia Sanchez.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, Division Head, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Laura McCreery, Project Director
Library School Oral History Series

August 2000
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The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Library School Oral History Series

April 2001

Fay M. Blake, *Information for All: An Activist Librarian and Library Educator at the University of California, 1961-1984*, 2001

Grete W. (Frugé) Cubie, *A Career in Public Libraries and at UC Berkeley's School of Librarianship, 1937-1975*, 2000

J. Periam Danton, *Dean and Professor at UC Berkeley's School of Librarianship, 1946-1976*, 2000

Fredric J. Mosher, *Reference and Rare Books: Three Decades at UC Berkeley's School of Librarianship, 1950-1981*, 2000

Flora Elizabeth Reynolds, *"A Dukedom Large Enough": Forty Years in Northern California's Public and Academic Libraries, 1936-1976*, 2000

Patrick G. Wilson, *Philosopher of Information: An Eclectic Imprint on Berkeley's School of Librarianship, 1965-1991*, 2000

Oral Histories in Process

Robert D. Harlan

INTRODUCTION by Anne Grodzins Lipow

I first met Fay Blake in 1974 at an ALA preconference on "Women in a Woman's Profession," sponsored by the Social Responsibilities Round Table Task Force on the Status of Women. There she spoke of the importance of organizing into unions to bargain for the needs of women in the workplace: childcare, parental leave, and higher pay. It is this concern about the status of women in librarianship that was a continued theme in her research and a focus for her personal involvement in campaigns to improve the status quo.

When Fay came to Berkeley and joined the School of Librarianship faculty in 1971, she merged her experience as a librarian in the trenches (she had worked in the UCLA library system for ten years) with her curiosity at a theoretical level. She used whatever knowledge she could gain about the practicing librarian to feed her theories about professionals and their work.

I found fascinating the results of a study she did on the position of librarians in higher education in California. Her study explained why the salaries of librarians in the community colleges were higher than the salaries of librarians in the state university libraries, which, in turn, were higher than the salaries of librarians at the University of California. In community colleges the master's degree was the highest degree required of faculty, so librarians were right up there with the faculty in level of education, and were paid, accordingly, at the highest level--on a nine-month basis with summers off. In the state colleges there was a mixture of degrees held by the faculty, so librarians' salaries were in the middle of the range. At the University of California, Berkeley, the master's degree was the minimum educational level of faculty members, so librarians were at the bottom of the pay scale.

Given her focus on the practicing librarian, it shouldn't be surprising that unlike others on the faculty, Fay did her research and planned the content of her courses by actually spending time in a library! I could hardly hide my amazement when she told me she wanted to know more about what it was actually like to work as a reference librarian and asked if I would help her get a short-term assignment at the reference desk. "I can be a better teacher of reference if I understand reference work better," she reasoned. To my knowledge, no library school faculty member had ever thought to use one of the great libraries of the world as a laboratory, though it was a three-minute walk from their offices. Except for Fay's work, there was little shared purpose between the librarians in the UC Berkeley library and the library school faculty. The library school was regarded as utterly unrelated to the library.

I recall the resistance of the library school to accept "Bibliography 1" into its curriculum as a one-credit undergraduate course. Bib. 1 was the brainchild of a librarian on the Berkeley campus, Charles Shane, who felt that (a) practicing librarians were the best ones to teach undergraduates how to find what they needed in the library; (b) students would choose Bib. 1 if they could receive course credit; and (c) only if the course were part of the library school curriculum could the students be given credit. Sections would be taught by campus librarians who would be given release time from their regular duties to take on this assignment. Great idea! Anybody who ever went to library school could be counted on to say, "Oh, if I had only known this when I was an undergraduate." Now library schools are beginning to offer courses in information systems and resources to undergraduates, but in those days it was regarded as a distraction from the true scholarly mission of the school, and the library school aligned itself with that view.

On the other hand, since academic departments received campus funding based on student enrollments in their program, the school stood to gain easy funds from the popularity of Bib. 1, so the school reluctantly agreed to sponsor the course. Fay was appointed faculty advisor to Bib. 1--from the school's perspective, probably a booby prize for Fay; from the Bib. 1 faculty's perspective, a godsend. Whatever the topic, she raised it to a conceptual level. That was always very helpful. It forced the instructors to think about what they taught in a context. The academic emphasis she contributed was clearly different from the stress on the practical that librarians were used to, and the two outlooks blended into a healthy hybrid that made the course a huge success over the many years of its existence. Bib. 1 ended when the school restored its priorities: "Only scholarly work takes place here."

A word about Fay's personal style: Thinking back to my conversations with Fay, I recall a clear sense of urgency in her voice. When she was criticizing some aspect of the status quo (a common occurrence), her complaint was always accompanied with a way to fix the problem. Her language was not academese. It wasn't couched in euphemisms. It was clear and to the point. She invariably shifted the listener's attention to where things needed to be improved.

In this oral interview, Fay's account of her years on the faculty of the library school gives a perspective that is unique among the faculty but probably represents the observations about the school of most of the women students who attended--at least through the eighties. As was typical throughout the school's history, Fay was one of the few women on the faculty. I was in the class of '61, some time before Fay arrived, and upon graduation joined the staff of the UC Berkeley library, where for the next thirty years I held many positions. Though it didn't reach my full consciousness until years after I graduated, I knew from my earliest days in the graduate program that there was

something odd about a school in which a faculty of mostly men trained a student body of mostly women to enter a female occupation, and the women faculty held the lowest ranks.

Fay held a lecturer (not on the ladder-to-tenure) position. The library school faculty rationalized its rejection of Fay into the ladder ranks on the grounds that her research wasn't of a scholarly nature. Nonsense. It was her colleagues' inability to rise above the prevailing attitudes about women and work that made them so shortsighted. Until the eighties, the highest rank a woman faculty member in the library school could attain was Associate Professor, and that title was rarely bestowed. Thus, Fay fit into a well-established mold that, though cracked, still hasn't been broken. Her perspective on the library school is that of an outsider on the inside, and as such hers is a true story that badly needs telling.

Anne Grodzins Lipow
Founder and Director
Library Solutions Institute and Press

Berkeley, California
September, 2000

INTERVIEW HISTORY--Fay M. Blake

As a youngster, Fay M. Blake once stole a book from the New York Public Library. She didn't intend or even wish to keep it; she merely wanted to read it immediately, and she had already checked out the maximum number of books allowed to children. Her mother made her return it and confess her "crime," and a kindly librarian (who could scarcely believe Fay's voracious reading habits) let her check out extra books. The moral: you can change the system.

Of course, Fay was not yet an activist in those waning days of the 1920s, and she was still years away from being a librarian. But that incident hinted at her lifelong habit of solving problems based on her own trusty logic (though she hastens to emphasize she never stole anything again).

Fay went on to involve herself in many social and political causes during her formative years. After graduating from Hunter College in New York City, she moved to Los Angeles during World War II. Eventually, she attended library school at the University of Southern California and took a position at the UCLA library, where she rose to head the acquisitions department's "gifts and exchange" program. She completed a Ph.D. in English literature at UCLA and then joined the School of Librarianship faculty at UC Berkeley in 1971.

In Fay's eightieth year, I recruited her to participate in the Library School Oral History Series. Her colleagues promised that her voice would provide a contrast to those already in the series, and they hinted that I would enjoy knowing Fay and her husband, H. Morton Newman. They were so right.

When I first arrived at Fay and Mort's home in a Berkeley cooperative retirement building, they struck me as curious, bright, funny, and savvy. Our first meeting served only to get acquainted and plan how the oral history project would proceed. Although I tried to address her as Dr. Blake, Fay quickly waived away all formalities while Mort served tea in the sunlit alcove. Books lined every wall of their living room, much as feathers to a nest. As we talked, Fay occasionally jumped up to retrieve a book or article I might like to see.

At length, Fay asked if Mort could join us for our interview meetings, saying he often reminded her of important details. Although such an arrangement was unusual, I agreed to try it. Mort's presence turned out to be a boon to our project. Although he usually listened quietly, he occasionally added to the substance and the detail of our conversations. I came to learn that Fay and Mort are true collaborators in life, and storytelling is something they do together with ease. Thus

Mort did sit with us while we taped, except during one session when he was too busy putting together an issue of their newsletter, *News from Nowhere*, a quarterly compilation of essays, reviews, and humor that goes out to family, friends, and anyone else who wants it. In keeping with the Blake/Newman philosophy, and with a nod to William Morris, *News from Nowhere* is free for the asking.

Taping one hour at a time, we created six hours of interviews between January and March 2000. Fay and Mort read over a draft of the transcript in June, changing only a few words. Having conducted oral history interviews themselves, they understood the process well, and both of them were content to let the transcript stand. A few minor copyediting changes were made at my suggestion.

The finished oral history memoir is not long, but it contains a wealth of material on the history of the library school. Fay's presence on the school's faculty (1971 to 1984) contrasted with that of her colleagues, and this volume explains why. Fay also added to the value of the series by discussing the school's field studies program, her serious and sustained effort to bring library services to unusual settings for the good of all.

It is a great pleasure to have conducted these interviews and to add them now to the Library School Oral History Series. Readers will find much of interest in Fay's story, from the labor organizing events of her youth to the vagaries of teaching librarianship during the Vietnam War. The school itself is gone now, existing only as history. Here's the news from nowhere.

Laura McCreery
Interviewer/Editor

November 2000
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name FAY M. BLAKE

Date of birth 9/15/20 Birthplace NEW YORK CITY

Father's full name IRVING MONTAUG

Occupation FACTORY WORKER Birthplace RUSSIA

Mother's full name SYLVIA FEILER MONTAUG
DOMESTIC WORKER

Occupation GARMENT WORKER Birthplace AUSTRIA

Your spouse H. MORTON NEWMAN

Occupation PRINTER Birthplace POMONA, CA

Your children SYLVIA ROGERS

Where did you grow up? NEW YORK CITY

Present community BERKELEY

Education BA, MA, MSLIS, Ph.D.

Occupation(s) ASSEMBLY LINE WORKER, BOOKKEEPER,
LIBRARIAN, SENIOR LECTURER, POLITICAL CAMPAIGN
DIRECTOR

Areas of expertise UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN - EXCHANGES

WITH UNIVERSITY & NATIONAL LIBRARIES, PUBLIC
LIBRARIES. - POPULAR CULTURE, ENGLISH & AMERICAN
LITERATURE

Other interests or activities POLITICAL ACTION, ENVIRONMENTAL
ISSUES, LABOR ORGANIZATION

Organizations in which you are active GRAY PANTHERS, FRIENDS OF BP,
WILLIAM MORRIS SOCIETY, GEORGE BERNARD SHAW SOCIETY

INTERVIEW WITH FAY M. BLAKE

I FAMILY BACKGROUND, CHILDHOOD, EARLY EDUCATION

[Interview 1: January 20, 2000]##¹

Father's Family Emigrates From Russia

McCreery: This is Laura McCreery for the Library School Oral History Series interviewing Fay M. Blake at her home in Berkeley, California, along with her husband, H. Morton Newman. Good morning to both of you.

Newman: Good morning.

Blake: Good morning. Glad you're here.

McCreery: Thank you. To start off, I'll just ask you to tell me your date of birth and a little bit about where you were born.

Blake: I was born on September 15th, 1920, in New York City, in Manhattan.

McCreery: Had your family lived there long at that time?

Blake: My father [Irving Montaug] came from Russia when he was, oh, maybe ten, and my mother [Sylvia Feiler Montaug] came from Austria when she was about twelve, and they came directly to New York, as most European immigrants did at that period, and remained in New York. My father's family--my grandfather had a shoe repair shop in Yonkers, New York, which is just north of New York City.

McCreery: That's your paternal grandfather?

¹## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

Blake: My paternal grandfather. So my father lived in Yonkers for several years and attended elementary school there for two years, from ten to twelve, and then he left school to take a job. As soon as he was settled into working, he came to New York, too. My mother and father met in New York and lived in New York for most of their married life.

McCreery: Do you know how they met?

Blake: Yes. They met at a youth club in lower Manhattan. That was a very popular activity at that time. Young people would come. There would be dances or social activities. Both of them came to a dance at the youth club, and they liked each other and began to go out. So that was the beginning of their relationship.

McCreery: Just a little more about your father's family. Did he have siblings?

Blake: Yes. My father's father, my grandfather, came to this country alone, leaving his wife, my grandmother, and three children with my father on the way. She was pregnant with my father. He was born while his father was still in this country, working and collecting enough money to bring the family over. This was traditional. Thousands of families did this. After he had enough money, he would bring them one at a time. He brought the oldest brother, then a younger brother, and then finally my grandmother and my father and his sister came over together. The family was separated for years. Finally got together. You can see how many years because my father hadn't even been born when his father left, and he didn't see him again until he was --I can't remember. I think he was about ten.

McCreery: That's astonishing, isn't it, the length of separation, which was very common then.

Blake: By that time, his father had enough money to set up this little shoe repair shop. He had been a shoemaker in the old country. They lived in a tiny apartment behind the shop. I used to stay there with them quite frequently after I was born. The living quarters were behind the shop. I think it was just two rooms behind the shop, and a toilet out in the hall.

McCreery: Do you know where in Russia your father came from?

Blake: Yes. My father was born in a small town near Brest-Litovsk. You know, Jews were not allowed to live in the big cities in Russia, so they set up these little shtetls, they were called, tiny villages, which were Jewish. But the nearest big city was

Brest-Litovsk. He never saw Brest-Litovsk. They lived in the small town. He did tell me about--and my grandmother told me about--a pogrom. Every once in a while the Cossacks, either for fun or for political purposes, would invade one of these shtetls and lay it waste. Most of the population, if they got any warning at all, would go into the cellars. My father vaguely remembered this one with which the family all were in the cellar. My grandmother had to come upstairs to get something for this family of young kids, and she was attacked by the Cossacks, and she had a lifelong scar on her head after that, which I saw. I was very close to my grandparents when I was old enough.

One of the reasons I was so close to them was that I spoke Yiddish, which was their native language and my first language, and so I could communicate easily with them in Yiddish. The other grandchildren got away from it. You know, it was beneath them to speak Yiddish; that was a language of the past. And so she couldn't communicate too well with her other grandchildren, but I would often stay with them.

I remember my grandfather taking me to the biggest movie house in downtown Yonkers. We walked from the shop to downtown Yonkers and, because it was a movie and a vaudeville show--I don't remember the movie, but I remember the vaudeville show [laughs]. A clown, eccentric dancing, a singer. I remember that quite vividly, and I must have been all of five years old.

Mother's Family History in Austria and Emigration to the U.S.

McCreery: Then tell me something about your mother and her family.

Blake: My mother came from Austria, where there was plenty of anti-Semitism, but Jews weren't quite as roughly handled as in Russia. Her mother died when my mother was six, and there were three brothers and a newborn sister, because her mother died in childbirth. The six-year-old had to take care of the household. She became the household drudge, from six to--when did she leave? Well, when she was ten, an uncle of hers said they were going on a big excursion together. He was going to take her to Vienna, which she had never seen, and he did. He took her to Vienna.

McCreery: Where were they living?

Blake: They were living in, again, a small town, a medium-size town. It is now Czechoslovakia. The closest big city, I suppose, is Bratislava. But at that time it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire [now Slovakia]. He took her to Vienna. He told her to sit on a street curb and he would be back, and he never came back. He abandoned her. Hours later she was sitting on this street curb, this little ten-year-old, crying, and a young woman came over to ask her what had happened. She told her the story, in German, and [the young woman] said, "Well, do you know how to reach him? Do you know where he is?" No, she didn't. So she said, "Well, come home with me. At least I'll give you something to eat."

Home turned out to be a brothel. She was a prostitute in a brothel. There was a system in Vienna in this period--this is pre-World War I. The army officers, Viennese army officers, often established "relationships," so to speak, with women in local brothels. The reason they did that was because it was almost impossible for them to marry. They didn't make enough to set up a home, and so they would establish a relationship. The women in these army-type brothels got regular physical exams, so there wasn't that much danger of venereal disease, and they would hire a little girl, like my mother, to run errands and messages back and forth--you know, before telephones. So she would run messages back and forth. She would do shopping for them.

She remembered vividly that the young woman who had taken her in--and the others, too, but this one especially; she's kind of under her wing--would constantly warn her: "Don't you do this. Don't get sucked into this. It's not a good life, and you're a slave here." My mother told me she once asked her, "Well, what should I do?" And she said, "Go to America," that there are jobs there. So she put money away and planned to do just that.

Just before she left, she went back to her hometown to say goodbye to her father. She had never spoken to him after--you know, she felt he participated in this desertion. She went back to say goodbye to her father and to her young sister, whom she had cared for. She spent one night there to say goodbye to them. She never saw them again.

McCreery: How old was she by this time?

Blake: She was twelve, and she came alone to the United States, steerage, in the hold of a ship, a crowded ship. By this time, her oldest brother was in America already, so he lent her a little money to help her with the ticket.

McCreery: Was she able to come to him when she arrived?

Blake: No, no, he was gone. He was working. She took a room. This woman had a three-room apartment, and she would rent out "hot beds," you know? You could stay in the bed for six hours and then you had to leave because the next shift would come in. So she had a bed in the little apartment. She got a job as a domestic, as a servant. And then the rest of her time in New York, she went back and forth between working in the garment industry, which paid a lot better than being a domestic but was much harder work. They were long hours. So she would work as long as she could in the garment factory, and when she was exhausted she would quit and she'd go back to work as a domestic.

She did learn to be a very good cook. She was a fine cook, kind of noted in the neighborhood, because the women whom she worked for would give her access to ingredients she would never have known about before. So that was her working life. She continued to work after she was married. She was working when I was young, again--but on and off, in the garment industry.

McCreery: You mentioned that your parents met at a youth club.

Blake: A youth club, yes.

McCreery: Tell me a little more about your own immediate family and any siblings of yours.

Blake: I knew both my mother's family and my father's family. By this time my mother's oldest brother [Morris Feiler] was here. He worked in a hotel in Chatham, New York, which is upstate New York, near Albany. Her two youngest brothers were still in Europe, and her sister, one sister. The second brother [Harry Feiler] had been drafted into the Austrian army in World War I, so they were completely separated. They didn't see each other then.

After the war was over--Harry had been taken prisoner and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp near Kazakhstan somewhere. He had been taken prisoner by the Russians, and the Russians had a prisoner-of-war camp in--I don't know where, somewhere in--maybe Khazakhstan or something like that. He said he enjoyed it! Nice weather, and he was away from the fighting. He didn't mind that! But he was very emotionally upset because by that time he'd married, and by this time his wife was in Hungary, which was also part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the communication was almost impossible.

So after Harry was released from the prisoner-of-war camp, he went back to Hungary and set up a kind of an establishment with his wife, but they soon realized that he had to go to America. That was the big draw. He came to America. The idea was to send for his wife, and by that time he had a baby girl, a baby daughter. My mother and my uncle used to tell this story, and they'd always start crying. He finally got enough money together to bring his wife and baby daughter to America. She arrived. They went to Ellis Island to bring them home, and [the authorities] wouldn't release them. They sent them back. They sent them back to Europe again.

McCreery: What reason did they give?

Blake: They gave a reason, and I can't remember what it was. It was some bureaucratic thing, something with the papers were not in order. They sent them back, and it must have been three years before they could bring them back again. It was absolutely heartbreaking. There they were. They could talk to each other through a bar--you know, they couldn't actually fully see each other or touch each other, and back she went, she and the little girl.

Let's see. My mother never saw her father again. He and her sister--her sister was married and had six kids--we communicated. We wrote to each other, but when Hitler took over Austria and this area where she was, the last we heard they had all been taken to a concentration camp. Long after World War II, my mother's oldest brother went back to this town to see if he could find any traces of the family: the father, the sister and her husband and their six kids, and a brother, Isaiah, and his wife and their children. I don't know how many children there were. They were all taken off to the nearest concentration camp and were presumably dead. He could find no traces of them.

But then he did find a trace of Isaiah. He was married, and he had a couple of kids--I don't know how many kids--and then he just disappeared suddenly. They figured he had just deserted his family, and he was regarded as just a bum, you know, to have done something like that. It was only after my oldest uncle went back that he discovered that what he had done was not desert his family but join the Resistance.

My mother came from an area that was in the middle of the Carpathian mountain range, and he knew the mountains thoroughly because he had been brought up there. His job in the Resistance was to transport people through these mountain passes. He knew about six languages because it was a border

area, so he was very valuable. He did that all through the war, and at the very end they caught him and they executed him. Just before the war was over. Her family was just devastated.

McCreery: All this was discovered on that return trip?

Blake: That return trip, yes. As a matter of fact, I told you that my first language was Yiddish, and in order to communicate with her sister, who was still in Europe, before the devastation of the Hitler period, my mother taught me how to write in Yiddish so that I could write letters back to her sister, and we communicated that way.

McCreery: That's a wonderful connection, then. It must have meant so much.

Blake: Yes, it did.

Family Life in Manhattan: A Political Upbringing

McCreery: Was your mother willing to talk about these events?

Blake: Sometimes. She would talk about her life in Europe. We had quite an extended circle that would often meet in our home. Both my mother and father were politically active. My mother was very active--early on, she joined Margaret Sanger in her birth control clinic. She worked there. So they were very active and had a wide circle of friends.

I remember Friday night was the time that everybody would get together, and I had learned early on to hide behind the couch and keep very quiet so they'd forget that I existed, that they hadn't sent me off to bed, and then I'd get to listen to all these stories. That's mostly how I learned not only hers but the other people there--all of them had heartbreakers to tell.

That also was how I honed my knowledge of Yiddish, because most of this was in Yiddish. My parents soon learned English. Almost everybody soon learned English. My grandmother never learned English. I always spoke to her in Yiddish. But the stories--when they talked about the old times and the homes--those were in Yiddish.

McCreery: That must have been quite an influence on you.

Blake: It was. It was, including the political activities. People would come and--I remember they had one friend who would come every Friday. David, his name was. He would bring a little red book, and it was a book of the songs of the I.W.W., the Industrial Workers of the World, of which he was a member. We would sing the songs together, so I learned them from the little red book.

The political influence was very strong. It was all left wing. My uncle [Harry Feiler], the one whose family had been sent back again--he was a house painter and a very active member of the painters' union. There was lots of labor strife at the time, and he was deeply involved in that. He would come back and tell about picket lines. They were not quiet, calm picket lines! So all of this was a very strong influence on my life.

McCreery: You've described the kind of work that your mother was doing. I note here that your father is listed as a factory worker. What, specifically, was he doing?

Blake: Yes. When I was maybe a year old, he got a job at the National Biscuit Company [Nabisco], working on the cookie assembly line, Oreo cookies. Then he was promoted after a while to a checker on the line, which meant that he would work on the line and then at a certain point would leave the line in order to count what the production was for each hour or each morning, I think it was. He got a slight raise for that, but the conditions were terrible, long hours.

My father was one of the initial founders of the union. It took them years, but they finally got the union recognized. At one point he and his fellow National Biscuit Company workers were on strike for nine months, nine long months. I remember both my younger brother and I participated--I think my mother arranged this, but my father was involved in it, too. My brother and I, who were youngsters--they made picket signs for us, and we went to the local grocery store and picketed that they boycott, that they not buy National Biscuit Company products, so that the neighborhood would know about it. The neighborhood knew all about it!

The owner of the grocery store came out and pleaded with my mother and said, "You know I'm with you. What are you doing? You're killing me." She said, "The next time the National Biscuit Company truck comes, tell him to take all the NBC products out and then we will notify the neighborhood that you've done a good deed." So he did just that. I remember that very vividly.

So I had an early introduction to labor organization and left-wing political activity.

Early Schooling, 1920s

McCreery: Yes, it sounds like it. Now, where in Manhattan were you living most of your childhood?

Blake: When I was born, we were living on the Lower East Side on East Second Street. I remember that quite vividly. We moved fairly frequently. One reason I know this is that I attended eight different elementary schools! [laughs] One of the reasons we moved was that if you moved into a new apartment, they gave you a month's rent concession. For one month you didn't have to pay rent. So we would move, we would get a month's rent concession, we'd pay rent for five or six months, and then we'd move again so that we'd get another month's concession.

But eventually I lived in all five boroughs of New York, and that's considered quite an unusual feat. I was born and spent my early childhood and started school in Manhattan. Then one of the places we moved was to the South Bronx, and I spent a few years there. We lived for one week in Brooklyn. My father was working with a man who had a house in Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn, and he offered us an apartment, to share his house. It seemed very nice, and it was a nice area, and so we moved out to Brooklyn. We moved over the weekend.

On Monday my mother took me on this long, long trek to the school, to register me in the public school. Then she asked my teacher what about a bus to bring me--it must have been about two miles from this house that we lived in to the public school. And the teacher said no. I had skipped a grade, so she said, "No, she's in the third grade or fourth grade, and the bus only comes for the first and second grades." So the next weekend we moved again, so I'd be near a school! [laughs]

So I lived in the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn. Then we had an arrangement with another man my father worked with, who had a house in Staten Island. We had a room in his house, where we lived every summer for eight or nine years. We would move out there. At that time Staten Island was almost pastoral. There were big fields where I would play and catch butterflies. There was a garden behind the house where we planted tomatoes. So it was quite idyllic, coming from the Lower East Side, as we

did, which was crowded and not too pleasant. So in the summertime we lived in Staten Island.

Then my father's older brother had a store, an upholstery shop, in Queens, and I would live with them on and off. I would help out in the store, and I would stay with them and come back home when it got too much for me [laughs]. So I lived in all five boroughs of New York in the course of my years there.

McCreery: Now, you mentioned a younger brother in passing. Tell me about your sibling.

Blake: He was eight years younger than I, and I was married for the first time when I was eighteen, so I really didn't know him too well. I knew him as an infant, but not later on. We were not very close, but eventually he came out to California, southern California, and he by that time had a wife and three kids. We still keep contact with his wife and my two nieces and a nephew, who live in southern California. But he and his wife were divorced, and it was not a happy situation. He was a wanderer. Neither his children, his wife, nor I really ever felt close to him. Then we were just notified a few months ago that he had died of emphysema.

McCreery: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Was that your only sibling?

Blake: That was my only sibling.

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McCreery: Well, you talked a little bit about all the different schools you went to as a youngster and I'm wondering, as time went on and you got a little bit older, what did you think of school?

Blake: Well, actually, I loved school, the whole experience, and I was much encouraged at home. The big lesson always was if you get an education then you're going to live better and your life will be more fulfilled and you'll be able to do more things that you want to do; you won't be so constrained. So education, education--that was always stressed.

And I liked it. I took to it very much. I was a fairly good student; I did well. I learned early how to take tests. That always helps! Of course, many of the schools I didn't get a chance to learn much about. The one that I was in for a week in Brooklyn I barely learned my teacher's name, and I was out again. But in general I had a happy experience in school. I thought my teachers were, almost without exception, dedicated

people, determined that we would learn. Most of us started out speaking another language, and they were determined that we would learn to read and write.

A Love of Reading; Discovering the Public Library

Blake: I still remember learning to read--or when I discovered I knew how to read--was a wonderful occasion in my life. The words began to jump out at me. My father was busy at work most of the time, but a very dedicated father. My mother was the one who took me off to the local public library, and I quickly learned that this was a great treasure. I would bring home as many books as they'd let me bring home.

The one occasion when I actually stole something was in a public library. I had gone there on a Friday evening. I was hoping to bring home--I think they allowed you two books over the weekend, something like that--and I had just started a book and was so enchanted with it that I wanted to bring that home, too. The librarian said: "Oh, no. I can't believe you would read that many books over the weekend anyway, so you can't take that with you." So I stuck it under my coat, and I came home with it, and then showed it to my mother! She was horrified. The library was closed on Sunday. Monday, right after school, she made me take that book--I still remember this so vividly--walk up the steps of an old Carnegie library, walk up the steps, go over to the librarian, give her the book, and tell her that I had stolen it.

It was the one of the hardest things I had ever, ever had to do, but it was a good thing for her to do it because--I didn't learn this until later--after I had done my penance, she went to talk to the librarian, and she said, "She's a great reader, and she really can finish three books over the weekend. Couldn't you find it in your heart to let her take some more books? If you doubt my word, talk to her teachers. They know what her academic standing is." And somehow or other, she arranged it, and I got to take home not only three books, but when we went during the summer to Staten Island, where there was no public library, they let me take I think it was something like seven or eight books to have for the summer, that I could read over the summer. I even remember what one of them was. It was Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

McCreery: I was going to ask what you were reading. I didn't expect that answer.

Blake: I was reading anything. I discovered Jane Austen. Anything that came my way. My mother was a great reader, too. She had taught herself, practically, to read, and then she went to night school. That was our break, one of the great things we did together. We'd go to the library and pick out books and come home and be excited about reading them.

McCreery: I can see why your parents valued education so much, knowing a little of their history.

Role of Religion; Effects of the Great Depression

McCreery: Now, you've mentioned the Jewish background of both your parents, separately. I wonder about the role of religion when you were growing up.

Blake: They were both atheists. We never practiced any religion, but my mother and father both insisted that I should know something about it. They told me something about the Jewish religion, so that I wouldn't disdain or insult the people, our friends, who did practice religion. Then my mother got this brilliant idea that she would take me--over a period of months this was--to all kinds of religious services so that I'd get an idea of what happened in churches and synagogues and even a mosque once.

So we would go every week. Over the weekend we'd go to some kind of service. I remember once she took me to Trinity Church in New York--that's the big Episcopalian church--to an Easter service. They were tossing incense, this procession down the aisle. Then she took me to a Catholic mass. I had decided that I didn't like any of them. I didn't want to go to any of them. When we'd covered maybe fifteen different churches and synagogues and one mosque and whatever, then she said, "Now I think you've had enough of a taste, a variety, so this is an actual choice and not my prejudice being transmitted to you." I knew my mother and father--my father, he refused. He wouldn't go near a synagogue or a church. But then it was my decision that I didn't think any of them had much to give me.

McCreery: How old were you by that time?

Blake: By the time she put me through this exercise, I must have been maybe twelve, something like that, because I was still in elementary--I wasn't quite twelve because I got into high school when I was twelve. Maybe eleven.

McCreery: That's still pretty young.

Blake: Yes, but I'd had enough.

McCreery: Yes. Well, it's clear that both of your parents were very self-made people once they arrived in America. I wonder, did the Great Depression have particular effects over and above that?

Blake: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That was a terrible, terrible time in our lives. My father still kept his job at the National Biscuit Company early on, but they put him on reduced hours, which meant reduced pay. My mother had lost her job; there wasn't any job for her. I remember for the first time in our lives--it was traumatic--we had to go [on welfare]. It wasn't called welfare at that time, it was called home relief. The social worker came and put us through a real--like a third degree. It wasn't her fault, you know. She had to do it. But a long list of questions, printed questions. One of the questions was: What kind of car do you own? Nobody we knew owned a car! We'd never owned a car. My mother was just scathing. She said, "A Rolls Royce, of course." [laughter]

The home relief consisted of a very small cash grant, and then the surplus food. It was really terrible, terrible food, plus it was so unplanned. We'd go to the depot, and they'd pile on thirty pounds of flour. Well, what would we do with thirty pounds of flour when we didn't have the other ingredients to make something out of it? It was really demeaning; it was humiliating.

I got a job. By this time I was in high school; in '32 I entered high school. They gave me a job. I was too young for the National Youth Administration; you had to be sixteen, I think, or--he would know. Mort was an administrator in the National Youth Administration. But the high school--I think it was the teachers themselves got together a fund, and they would hire some of the kids to clean out the lab, to scrub the floors. They gave me that kind of job to start with.

When I finally got on NYA, I got a job--oh, that was in college, by the time I got to college. Then I got a job that I really liked. I worked in the library at Hunter College. I enjoyed that very much. I remember--talking about the Depression--the librarian at one point said, "You know, I have a little errand for you. Would you go down to the florist down the block"--she gave me the money for it--"and bring back a little bouquet so we can put some flowers in the library?"

I had never been in a florist before. My mother was an avid--you know, she grew houseplants, little geranium plants. She loved planting. But I had never been in a florist because we didn't buy flowers.

Hunter College High School, 1932-1936

McCreery: That's a very telling detail, isn't it? Now, you were entering high school at quite a young age.

Blake: Yes. I was two years ahead of my age group because I had skipped grades. That was a system they had in the elementary schools. They'd pick out kids that were doing well. They'd give us extra tutoring and an exam, and then we'd be promoted to the next grade. So I did that four times. I made two years. The usual graduation from elementary school was fourteen; I graduated at twelve.

McCreery: Where did you attend high school?

Blake: Hunter College High School, which was a special high school in New York. You had to take an exam to get in. I remember--this was another example of the dedicated teachers. They asked me to bring my mother to school, and I was sure I'd done something outrageous. A mother didn't come to school unless you were about to be expelled or something! I told my mother, and I said, "I don't know what for, but you'd better come." So she came, and they took her into a special room, and they told her about Hunter College High School. They said it's for advanced students. She'll have to take an exam to get in. But we strongly urge it and advise it.

So my mother agreed. First of all, it was not in the neighborhood. We lived in the Bronx at that time, South Bronx. It meant I had to travel to school every day. It meant carfare, and it meant traveling alone. But my mother and father both thought I could do it, and that became a ritual. My father got paid Friday, and Friday night the family sat around and decided how to apportion his meager pay. I would get fifty cents for carfare for the week.

McCreery: Now, there was no charge to attend the school itself, but you had to get in under these special circumstances?

Blake: Yes, yes. You had to take a very--I think we spent a whole day taking exams. You had to pass that at a certain level. And

then, once you were accepted into Hunter College High School, you had to keep up a certain grade level. Otherwise you were politely asked to go back to another high school in the city, near where you lived. Anybody who didn't make at least B grade didn't stay on in that school.

McCreery: Tell me a little bit about the high school.

Blake: It was probably the best thing that could have happened to me. It was an all-girls school. There were four special high schools set up in New York: an all-girls school, Hunter College High School for academically promising students; an all-boys high school, similar, DeWitt Clinton; the High School of Music and Art for students who showed special gifts in music and art; and Haaron High School, which was kind of a trade school, although they had an academic program, but they were training boys--an all-boys school--training them in aeronautics and automobile mechanics, automobile engineering. They weren't exactly teaching them to be mechanics; they were hoping for higher things, to go on to an engineering school. But there were four special high schools.

My high school, Hunter College High School, was almost like a straight training school to go into Hunter College afterwards.

McCreery: Which you did.

Blake: Which I did, yes. Most of us did. It meant that we took almost double the number of courses that the other high schools in the city did. New York State had Regents' exams, uniform exams that were given statewide to all the high schools, and if you got a certain average from these Regents' exams, the state gave you a scholarship. To give you an example of the Depression years, the whole scholarship, for all four years, was four hundred dollars, a hundred dollars a year. But that paid for everything. We didn't have any entrance fees in college, but it paid for textbooks, it paid my carfare, it really meant the difference between being able to go to college and not being able to, the four hundred dollars. But being at Hunter College High School almost automatically meant for me that I would get that scholarship, and I did.

Newman: Tell her of the edict that you could not walk in the May Day parade.

Blake: Oh, yes! The principal of Hunter College High School was Miss Louisa Webster, and you called her Miss Webster! She came from an old-line American family, and she was trying to teach us all

in high school to be ladies. As a matter of fact, we had assemblies every week, and at one assembly she announced to us that "what we're trying to train you for is to become the wives of diplomats." Not diplomats, the wives of diplomats! Anyway, you wore gloves when you went outside, and you were never caught eating outside, and you didn't chew gum ever, ever, ever!

One day she called me into her office, and she said, "Fay, I know you from the past. I know you're planning to march in the May Day parade. You absolutely can't. If you do, you'll be expelled." So I had to make a choice. I said, "Well, then, I'll be expelled. I'm going to march in the May Day parade." And I did.

Three weeks before, I had been in an interscholastic competition, submitting I think it was an essay of some kind. Just before May Day--this had taken place in April, I think, and at the end of April the announcement came by, and I had won the citywide competition, so how could she expel me? So I wasn't expelled.

One of the interesting things was that--both my parents marched in the May Day parade, and I marched with the American Student Union. Behind us was a group from a teachers union. One of my teachers was marching at the same time, so that made a kind of camaraderie. In the Depression period there was a sense of--well, first of all, of earnest desire to make life better and that activity like this *could* make life better. We had a sense of hope. I don't have much of that left anymore. I don't have much hope. But I recall that with some pleasure.

McCreery: The feeling of the time. Well, I wonder, at the time Miss Webster called you into her office, specifically why was she forbidding you to march?

Blake: Well, she was so busy--I doubt if it was political, much. It was more social. She was so concerned that "her girls"--and we were her girls--be ladies. Well, ladies didn't march in May Day parades, you know. I don't think she even knew what a May Day parade was. It was just not--I wasn't going to march in it.

McCreery: It wasn't going to keep you on the path to being the wife of a diplomat!

Blake: How could I ever become the wife of a diplomat? But I got a wonderful education there. I wanted to write, and I enjoyed writing, and my teachers were always encouraging me to write.

They had a ruling in the school. At the end of your freshman year, they gave a comprehensive grammar exam, and if you passed that with an A, you didn't have to take grammar courses anymore. You could take other kinds of English classes. So I passed that, and they put me into a class, a writing class, with me and a teacher. That was it.

Once a week she would come. We would spend an hour, an hour and a half together, maybe two hours together. She would go over what I had written--strictly, you know. Everything was carefully gone over. I was encouraged to write. I did write. But I was also taught *how* to write. I remember she would say things like, "Loosen up. We know you know grammar. You don't have to stick to grammar if you're doing dialogue. Do it like real people talk." As a result, I actually had some things published while I was still in high school.

McCreery: Can you give me an example?

Blake: Well, I didn't even know about this. I never submitted it. She did; the teacher did. It was an interscholastic publication, a journal that came out twice a year. This was an essay I had written about rain, "Rain on Park Avenue." Now, in New York there are two Park Avenues. It's one Park Avenue, but it's two different worlds. I lived near one of them, and that was a slum in the South Bronx. The railroad train went along Park Avenue. The other Park Avenue was high-toned, upper-class Park Avenue.

So I took a raindrop falling down a window first on the Park Avenue and 55th Street and then another raindrop [on] Park Avenue in the South Bronx, and what the raindrop saw. I have no copy of it. I can hardly remember what I thought they saw, but I made a distinction between the two Park Avenues, and it was published in this interscholastic journal and then the teacher showed it to me. She said, "I submitted this, and it has been published." So that was my first published piece.

McCreery: Wonderful. That shows your great awareness of the class system at that time.

Blake: Yes, I was well aware of the class difference. I don't know if Miss Louisa Webster would have approved of me, but I guess she did since publication was a sign that it had been accepted.

High School Influences and Interests

McCreery: Who were the influential adults in your high school years, either in your family or outside?

Blake: In my high school years. Well, all of my teachers at Hunter College High School were excellent. I mean, anybody that could teach me physics and math has to be excellent because that's not what I wanted to learn. My mother and father were always important influences. Apart from intellectual influences, my grandmother, my father's mother, was an important influence: the language and the relationship with the past.

You know, we had no past. I remember when I was in elementary school and I'd read a story about this girl who went up to the attic and found her grandmother's bridal gown. There was no such thing in my life. We were refugees all our lives. We brought nothing with us. I didn't even know who my great-grandmother and grandfather were. On my mother's side, I didn't even know who my grandmother and grandfather were. I never saw them. There was no long history. They didn't come over on the Mayflower; they came over in steerage. So she was important. She was my link to Europe and to the past and whatever she remembered about her mother and father.

Let me see. Who else? Well, as I told you, there were these family and social groupings I was a part of. There was another important influence, not so much of individuals, but this was a period of the Civil War in Spain. My mother and father were both very active in that. We were sending packages and collecting money. I would often be at meetings where I would hear the stories about what was going on in Spain. Since I was very much interested in literature, I would go to--I remember once going to a bookstore where--it wasn't [Ernest] Hemingway, but it was a writer, an important writer at that time--came to talk about experiences in Spain. These were important influences in my life.

McCreery: Did you share your parents' involvement in supporting the Spanish Civil War?

Blake: Oh, yes, yes. This was an example: I liked dolls when I was little, but by this time I wasn't playing with them. But I had one doll which I treasured and kept. My mother made clothes for the doll, and very imaginative ones. She made a Russian boy's costume for the doll, and she made other things. She was sending off a package to Spain, and I brought her the doll, and I said, "Send the doll." Which she was delighted to do. I was

sorry to see the doll go, but I would be happy that some Spanish kid would be able to play with it. So it was very important to me. They brought me into the activities and what was happening.

McCreery: Did your own friends share these kinds of interests?

Blake: No, most of them didn't. My closest friends were not politically involved. Oh, yes, there was one, a very close friend. She and I were very close all through high school. Her parents had come from Germany--her mother had come from Germany; her father was dead. They were very passionate anti-Fascist, anti-Nazi. She and I would go--I was studying German, so we went together to hear Thomas Mann speak, in German. I would go with her to see movies from Switzerland which were in German or the old German silent films, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari."

Her family was politically active, but at one point she and I were together and she said, "You know, my mother is wondering whether we should continue being this close, you and I." And I said, "Why?" She said, "Well, you know, you're Jewish and I'm not. If we ever get Fascism or Nazism here, I would be in big trouble being close friends with a Jewish girl." So I said, "Well, okay, you decide." I did see her after that, but not as often, as you can imagine! They were supposed to be so damn anti-Nazi; they couldn't see her being friends with a Jewish girl.

My other friends, my other close friends in high school were not politically involved at all. We did other things. We went to WPA [Works Progress Administration] Federal Theater project. We went to see Gilbert and Sullivan together, or we went to see--I remember a play by Oliver Goldsmith at the WPA. The WPA theater was very important in our lives, because you could go for twenty-five cents to the theater. I never could afford Broadway theater, but I could afford the WPA plays once in a while. So the activities, during the Depression, of artists and performers became available and were important influences in my life.

II COLLEGE, EARLY JOBS, GRADUATE STUDY

[Interview 2: January 27, 2000] ##

Attending Hunter College, 1936-1940

McCreery: When we left off last time, we talked about how after having skipped grades early on, you graduated from Hunter College High School at the age of fifteen. We talked about how you planned all along to go on to Hunter College itself. What were your impressions of Hunter College when you entered in 1936?

Blake: In 1936 Hunter College had the largest--we were told--the greatest number of women college students in one place in the United States. We had ten thousand students, which was unusual, and all women. The men were in, at that time, City College of New York. It was a godsend to New Yorkers, to women in New York in the middle of the Depression, because it was free and because it offered a chance for a college education to people like me, who could never have afforded it.

I had a New York State Regents' scholarship of four hundred dollars for all four years, a hundred dollars a year, and because the school itself was free, that got me through. I was living at home, and I paid my parents for board and room, and it got me through. I was able to survive on that. When I say "free," there were no tuition costs, there were no registration costs, it included textbooks, and it offered what I thought, and still think, was a very good education.

It had its limitations because the school had been set up originally by Thomas Hunter specifically to educate schoolteachers. So the intention of the courses was to make us eligible for teacher exams. Many of us would have become teachers except it was, as I said, the middle of the Depression, and New York City hadn't hired a teacher for something like eight or ten years. Not a single one. So we had no hopes of actually becoming teachers.

But it was nevertheless a good education I got there, a classical education. I had four years of Latin in high school, and I was required to take another year of Latin in college. But I like Latin, so that was okay. I wanted to be an English major, but you couldn't become an English major until your junior year, so I started out as a German major. I'd taken four years of German in high school, continued as a German major, and then in my junior year transferred to English major.

Because I had taken German in high school, my language requirement in college was another language, and I took French. Excellent teacher. I remember my experience there as a good academic--it was hard. I mean, there was no fooling around. We didn't have gym, and there was no extras, but it was a good education.

McCreery: The fact that it was set up as a teachers college--what effect do you think that had on the curriculum?

Blake: They recognized that the curriculum had become too limited, because they changed the name. It had been a normal school, and it became Hunter College. It also became part of, or was part of, the New York City higher education department, which was instrumental in changing the curriculum. But it was still a rather narrow curriculum.

For example, I had to take several--I can't remember if it was three or four--education courses, the most boring courses I think I ever had in my life. It had very little to do with education, really. It was just kind of rote learning. But that was essential if you were going to take a teacher exam. I did take a teacher exam when I got out, but I knew that I would never do anything with it, so it's just moldering somewhere.

McCreery: As you say, the hope of teaching was very slim.

Blake: By the time I got out in 1940 it had changed, but that's why I took the exam. But I could see that that wasn't the career I wanted to follow.

McCreery: Did you think much at the time about how a women's institution might have differed from your experience in a coeducational institution elsewhere? Did you think about it then?

Blake: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I had already been well indoctrinated because when I got into the seventh grade, I was in an all-girls school. Hunter College High School was all girls, and now Hunter College. Many of us felt that it limited our social contacts. We didn't know how to act when we were in

the same room with young men of our age. But it did concentrate our academic endeavors. We didn't have distractions like dating, at least in the first two years of college. It was pretty well dedicated to learning. It was limiting socially; it was an opportunity educationally. I don't know that I was ever, or continued to be, an advocate for segregated women's education, but it was all that was being offered to me, so I accepted it.

McCreery: Looking back now, do your views about having attended a women's college change over the years, just from your own experience?

Blake: Yes, I wish I hadn't. It would have been a more broadening experience if it hadn't been just a women's college.

McCreery: In your early years there, what were your views of the other students? It was a large school.

Blake: It was a large school, and that meant that each person's contacts were limited. But it was a very diverse student body. I remember one of my friends from the first year I got there was Pearl Primus, a young black woman who then became an internationally eminent dancer, who brought another dimension. There were some black students at Hunter College High School, but a very small proportion. At Hunter College it began to broaden our contacts. Some of it I was deliberately seeking because I had been brought up in a home where diversity, a fuller life, was an important aspect.

I remember Pearl and I having lunch together one afternoon. She came into the cafeteria and headed for the table where I was sitting, and there were some other of our closer friends together, and she was furious. She was just about ready to explode because she said, "You know where I'm just coming from? I had an interview at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel"--in New York. Was that the name of the hotel? "And I had to go in the back door because I'm black, I'm Negro," I think she said at that time. We were incensed at the insult. In New York City! This wasn't North Carolina. But that was one element of the times and of the school that was pushing for change in that area. I didn't have any black teachers. None of the faculty were, but there were students.

McCreery: Thinking of the faculty, I know that then you didn't think in terms of mentors and role models the way we use those terms today [laughter], but I wonder if there's anyone who had that role, shall we say, for you among the faculty there.

Blake: Not at Hunter College. It was too big. They were too overburdened. At Hunter College High School I had several mentors, but in college you were on your own.

McCreery: You didn't have particular faculty members who really took an interest in your personal development?

Blake: I was never aware of that. I think they were too overburdened. The classes were too big. It was not an atmosphere congenial to that. Some of the students may have had that. But by that time, by the time I got into college, my mentoring and my interests were really outside of the college, in political work.

Developing Political Interests Outside the Academy

Blake: As soon as I got to college, I joined the American Student Union and was active in it. One of our activities you might be interested in was when the German ship, the *Bremen*, came into New York harbor, we organized a protest demonstration in front of the ship, and I was at that.

Then, shortly after I had come to Hunter College, I was approached by some fellow students who were in the Young Communist League, and they asked me to join. I decided I would try to find out what they were about, as well as other left-wing youth organizations. So I went on a round of meetings to the Young Socialists, the Young Communist League. By that time there was a Lovestoneite Group. I went to one of those meetings, to decide what their aims were and what the possibilities of meeting those aims were. In my freshman year I decided to join the Young Communist League.

McCreery: How large a group was it at that time, and what were they working on?

Blake: I told you about the demonstration against the Nazi ship that had come in. There were about maybe fifteen of us in the group at Hunter College; it was a much bigger organization nationally. The decision then was that there were plenty of issues that we could be working on within the college or within the college community. For example, one of them was in our psychology class. We were issued a textbook, and the section on intelligence had a list of different American groups. On top of the list were the Jews [laughs], and then there were the English, the Anglo-Saxons, and then there were the Germans, and

at the bottom of the list, lowest in intelligence, were the Negroes.

Two of us, another young woman in my psychology class who was also a member of the Young Communist League and I, talked about this and brought it to the next meeting of the YCL, and everybody was appalled. We went to the dean of the psychology department, brought this to his attention, and said it was unacceptable that this textbook was being used for all the psychology students and that it shouldn't be. And they withdrew it, and they gave us another one. That was the kind of thing that we got involved in.

We were also very much involved, both the American Student Union and the YCL, in the whole question of peace. You know, World War II was beginning to show its ugly head. It hadn't come to that point yet, except in Europe, where it began in '39. But we were concerned that there were still possibilities for some kind of peace movement, negotiation or something rather than open warfare. So we were involved in a number of meetings and debates. Both the YCL and the ASU were very active in the peace movement.

McCreery: Do you recall your reaction upon hearing that the war broke out in Europe in '39?

Blake: Yes, I was appalled. My first year in college I had signed the Oxford Movement pledge, which was a pacifist movement--not that I was a member of the Oxford Movement but that I was a pacifist. And I am now. I was of the generation that, as children in the twenties, heard what happened in World War I. It was close to us, and what a horror and what an international slaughter it had been. We had an idea that if we got into World War II it would be even worse, so we tried all kinds of measures, demonstrations, writing articles, and delegations. But it didn't work.

McCreery: But it sounds as if your development and mentoring, for want of a better word, was really taking place outside the academic environment.

Blake: Yes. It was, except for my fellow students, a small number of fellow students who were also involved. But we were involved mostly out in the political world, and the college was just a place where we were getting our education, or that part of our education.

Marriage, 1938; Leaving New York, 1940

McCreery: You mentioned that you were still living at home.

Blake: For two of those years. As part of my activity in left-wing groups, that was my social life, too, that I would go to dances, parties, meetings. That was actually the only place where I met young men--the college certainly wasn't a place--and I met the man whom I married in 1938.

McCreery: Tell me about that.

Blake: Nah. I was a teenager. I didn't know what the hell I was doing. He was a very nice guy. Mort knew him. He's dead now. A very nice person, but he and I really weren't a pair. He was an auto mechanic, freelance because you couldn't get a job. He had done a lot of traveling. He was from New Jersey, and that was considered quite a miracle in New York. If you lived in Manhattan and you met a young man who lived in Brooklyn, even though you were having a very nice time, you knew that was the end of it because you would never go that far to see each other.

Well, here was a guy from New Jersey, from Newark, New Jersey, who had come into Manhattan to a party and who continued to come in. He was a good deal older than I, and I think I was kind of taken with his sophistication. I didn't know from beans, you know. So we married.

McCreery: Now, where did you live?

Blake: We had to live in New York, because you couldn't go to Hunter College if you didn't live in New York. So we lived in Manhattan on 2nd Street near Second Avenue, in a five-story walkup apartment. Of course, what would happen: you'd get to your door on the fifth story when you remembered you had forgotten to get something at the grocery store. Downstairs again, upstairs again. But we were young.

I was elected into Phi Beta Kappa in my junior year and was invited to this very, very formal initiation ceremony at one of the fancy West Side hotels in New York, which I had never been in before. It was a very formal dinner with speeches and, you know, the kind of thing that academics love to do. The reason I have always considered that very funny was what happened right after that. My then husband was waiting for me outside to take me off to--he belonged to the longshore workers union, because he was working as a longshoreman--and he was taking me

and himself off to a celebration dance. They had won a strike somewhere in New Jersey.

So we drove across the Hudson River to New Jersey and went to the union hall and as I walked in with him--I hadn't even taken my coat off when I was whisked away by one of the longshoremen, union men, and was dancing crazily around this union hall. Suddenly he dumps me and he takes off, and there's a punch-up going on in one corner of the room, and of course he couldn't miss participating in that.

I thought it was one of the funniest things that ever happened to me. This formal academic initiation banquet and then going to the union celebration, where everybody was a little bit pie-eyed. It was really representative of our lives, the two completely separated parts of our lives: the academic world, the labor union world; the formal, middle-class aspirations and the working-class realities of our lives. So I've always held that before me as an example of: "Don't forget your origins. Don't forget your roots."

McCreery: To see them both so close together.

Blake: Close together, one right after the other. He was anxious, very anxious to--he had been in Los Angeles, lived in Los Angeles for a couple of years and wanted to go back. He kept telling me these stories which I never believed--I thought they were fairy tales--about how it never snows and it never gets cold. Oh, yeah, yeah. It was the Chamber of Commerce. But I said I wouldn't leave New York until I graduated, because I knew if I didn't do it then, I'd never do it. So he agreed.

When the war preparations began--he was a welder, and he worked at the shipyards in Brooklyn, and he heard about these jobs that were opening up all over the country and was eager to get one of these jobs, which would be better. But I wouldn't go until after I graduated. In 1940, when I graduated, we first moved to New Jersey, to Newark. That was home for him. His family was there. I hated it, but it was okay, I guess.

Then he started with really pressuring that we should get out of the East Coast. The first thing he did--he found that they had opened a new shipyard in Mobile, Alabama. We'd go down there and he'd get a good job as a welder. So we went down there. I still remember it as one of the worst experiences in my whole life. It was the South, the Deep South. It was so benighted that I was appalled at the whole thing.

He got the job. I remember we got a room in a rooming house. To do laundry, I would take a big tub, take it out to the backyard, fill it from a hose with cold water. If it was important laundry or very, very dirty laundry, I would have to heat a kettle of water for hot water and bring it out to the back yard, scrub on a scrubbing board. It's not that I ever had a washing machine in New York, either, but there were some amenities!

Once he had a day off, and we decided we would go to the beach. Mobile is on the water. So I put on a bathing suit, and I put on, I think, a robe or an apron or something over the bathing suit and started to walk out to get to our car. Our landlady stopped me, literally took me by the shoulders and pushed me back into the room and said: "You can't go out like that! This is a decent house." So I was indecent.

I remember a couple of young black kids came into our backyard, and they asked for a job, cleaning up or something, and the landlady had them there. We were having lunch in the backyard, so we invited them to come join us. She was horrified. She said: "You don't sit down at a meal with niggers!" Which was really one of the few times in my life up to then that I'd heard that word. It was already passé in New York. You didn't use that kind of language. It was just dreadful. My husband finally agreed that it was, and we headed back to New York within--I think we were only there about three months or so.

Moving to California, Early 1942

Blake: He really began pressuring. What he really wanted to do was to go to Los Angeles. So we started out in the middle of a snowstorm.

McCreery: What year was this?

Blake: Right after Pearl Harbor, January 1942. We trekked our way through a snowstorm. I remember one night we stayed at a bed and breakfast place in the Middle West somewhere. My husband pulled the blanket off the bed, and I said, "Where are you going with the blanket? It's freezing." He said, "I have to wrap it around the motor of the car. It won't start in the morning." So the car got the blanket! It was quite an adventurous trip.

It was my first time out of the East, out of New York, and it was a revelation. In retrospect, there was much to learn and much to enjoy. At that time it was pretty horrendous. When we got to New Mexico, I remember--it was in January, so I was wearing something like four layers of clothing, sweaters and jackets and two pairs of pants and gloves and socks. In New Mexico I started to peel off these layers of clothing, as we hit civilized country.

We came through Barstow, but when we got to San Bernardino, I stripped down to the bottom layer of clothing, and I knew then that California was for me. I'd never experienced anything that marvelous. This was paradise. No snow in January. About the middle of January '42, we arrived in Los Angeles. My husband went out to Long Beach, where war preparations were really beginning. Immediately got a job, same day. We knew we were going to be Angelenos.

McCreery: Did he tell you much about what it was like in the shipyards there?

Blake: Oh, yes. He was an active Communist, too, and he was active in the union. We not only would share with each other, but he was involved in labor action. It was horrendous work. I remember once he didn't come home at the end of the shift, and I was worried sick. I even went to the local police station. I thought maybe something had happened. But they said, "We can't search--nobody's considered missing unless he's been gone for a week. Oh, just relax."

What had happened was that after his shift ended he was ordered to work another shift, a second shift, and we didn't have a telephone. There was no way he could let me know what was happening. But they were under really strict discipline. It was almost like a war footing already, although we had just gotten into the war. It was just after Pearl Harbor. But it was coming.

McCreery: Was there any threat that he would be called up?

Blake: Yes, there was. He was, as I said, much older than I, so he was past, really, the draft age, but they were beginning to draft older men. One of the ironic things that happened was that my father was called up. Let's see, in '42 he was forty-four years old, but he was called up. But he worked for the National Biscuit Company, and they said he was essential. They were producing K-rations for the army and that he was essential, so he didn't have to go, but it had gotten to that point.

McCreery: What did your parents think when you upped and moved West?

Blake: Oh, it was a sad time--for me, too, because I was very close to them. That was one of the reasons that I didn't want to go. But we promised each other that we would communicate, that we would write, and we did, and that as soon as it was possible, they would come and visit, and they did. In 1944 my daughter [Sylvia Rogers] was born, and they came out to see the new grandchild, their first grandchild.

My father could only stay--I can't remember if it was a week or two weeks. He had to go back to work, but my mother stayed for about a month and helped me take care of the new baby. Like me, they were convinced that they were going to be Angelenos, too. When the war was over, they both moved to Los Angeles. We remained close.

Interests and Activism During World War II

McCreery: You were just talking about moving West so that your husband could work in the shipyards, and it sounds as if you had no trouble connecting with some of the same interests that you had in New York, the Communist Party activities and so on. How did the scene in the Los Angeles area compare to the one in New York?

Blake: I'll tell you two immediate things. As soon as we came, the day after we came--there was a code or a system or something where, when you left you connected with your Party club. You told them where you were going to be because you'd want to be connected very quickly there, so they took a dollar bill, tore it in half. We kept half, and the other half was mailed to the Party office in Los Angeles. The day after we got to Los Angeles we went to the Party office, pieced together the two halves, and there we were. They assigned us to a club.

Newman: Pretty dramatic.

Blake: But it was a great way to make an immediate connection. We were meeting with a club that same week, and that made immediate friendships and closeness. But we came a week before the Executive Order [9066] ordering the Japanese out was taking effect. One of the first things we saw the day after we arrived were these Japanese homes being evacuated. People had their belongings out on the street, asking us if we wanted to buy them or take them.

We had not heard about this in the East, and of course we were traveling, so we weren't too aware of it. It was absolutely appalling. We wondered, isn't anybody saying, "Don't do this" or "What's going on here?" Well, nobody was, except Eleanor Roosevelt, to her credit. She opposed it, despite the fact that it was her husband's order. I'm afraid that the Communist Party was very delinquent in this. They had no organized action against it, maybe even approved it. I can't remember that too well.

Newman: It amounted to approval.

Blake: Of the war effort, yes.

Newman: But it was benign neglect. Well, first of all, the whole direction was, win the war and to hell with everything else. Very thoughtless.

McCreery: Now, where exactly were you living in the area?

Blake: In Los Angeles, in the southwest part of the city. I remember the street was Denker, but that wouldn't mean anything. It was the southwestern part. The shipyards were way out in Long Beach, or the shipyard where my husband was, so he had a long trip. I remember he got special gas coupons because he was an essential worker and needed it for transportation to work, but that was limited, too. We couldn't use it for anything else except that.

McCreery: But, as you say, the Japanese Americans were leaving right from the area where you lived?

Blake: Oh, yes. There were many Japanese Americans and Japanese living within that same area, and we could see the horror of it practically on our doorstep.

McCreery: What else would you say to compare the Communist Party organization in L.A. with that in New York?

Blake: Oh, it was smaller. The New York was the biggest one. It was less--a lot of the Communist Party in New York was immigrants or, like me, the first generation. In Los Angeles that was not true, for the most part.

Mort Newman's Family Background and Army Service

Blake: Mort is a good example. He's a native Californian, and his family goes back to--the first Newman we know about was the guy who hung out the lanterns for Paul Revere, from the Old North Church [in Boston], Robert Newman. I never met anybody like that in New York. Nobody had that kind of a background, at least not in my circle.

McCreery: That is rather impressive.

Blake: We have a fine story about that. We deliberately went to Boston. We were going to Boston for something else, but we deliberately went to the Old North Church in Boston, and Mort was sure that there would be no mention of Robert Newman. He's almost forgotten in this; it's all Paul Revere. We get to the church. The vicar comes out to talk to us, and Mort said something about his name was Newman. "Oh, Newman!" The vicar starts to tell us about Robert Newman, takes us around the church. They had two different plaques. And so we were very quiet, and said, "Oh, that's very nice."

McCreery: You mentioned at one point that Mort knew others in your family very early on. When did he enter the picture, and how?

Blake: Well, almost immediately. After we made connections and I went to work for--I was working for the Office of War Information. I got the job, and then I registered with--at that time there was a very active labor school in Los Angeles. I registered for a course in U.S. history. My teacher was the illustrious descendant of the illustrious Robert Newman. He had been assigned to teach the course. He was--well, you tell her what you were. I don't remember what you were in the Party.

Newman: I guess I was in charge of the YCL for Los Angeles County at that time and had done some teaching in labor schools.

Blake: He was a very good teacher. He was challenging. I mean, he didn't just accept the line. He questioned it. We took to each other. But then, very shortly after that, he was off to the army. You volunteered, didn't you?

Newman: Yes, though I was a pacifist in my thinking. But you get so caught up in something like that.

McCreery: Well, that war in particular. It was pretty universal, from what I have heard.

Newman: Yes.

Blake: It was against a lot of our basic principles, but it was also something that you almost had to do. So he joined up, went off to Texas for his basic training. I would hear about him. We weren't in direct communication, but I would hear about him from other Party people. Then he was sent to New Caledonia. Then he was in our invasion, under [General Douglas] MacArthur, of the Philippines, and he ended up in an office across the hall from General MacArthur, whom we detested, but he was--what were you?

Newman: I was the chief clerk in one of the key offices there. Of course, that was an interesting thing. You know, Communists were segregated out, and my first segregation was being assigned to the medical division because they didn't want to arm Communists, you see. So I was in the 8th General Hospital in New Caledonia, and I became the I & E person for it, Information and Education. Some of the brass from the Information and Education came through New Caledonia and met me, and they decided that I should go to officer's training school.

Then the army began sifting through my records, and they decided no, but they would honor a request that I had made to be into an active sort of thing rather than the hospital. The inspector general decided to send me to the Philippines instead of to the I & E school [laughs]. It was all done good naturedly. But then what happened was they segregated out my papers, so that while I thought they had my papers, once I got to the Philippines, they knew nothing about my past at all, and that's how I became chief clerk.

My office handled all the secret papers. I was in charge, and they would bring documents from MacArthur's office to me. I would type them out, take them with single fingers of each hand, cut a mimeograph stencil, and two army officers would be standing beside me, and I'd say, "How many copies?" and they'd say, "Thirteen." If I had to run fourteen or fifteen, the extras were burned in a little incinerator on my desk.

Blake: This is all under armed guard.

Newman: So I was handling top secret documents. It was so strange.

Blake: War is crazy. I don't know if you met my parents. He may have met my parents when they were visiting. No, no, I think you were gone already. Yes, you were gone then. But when he came back in '45, he went back into action. My parents came in '46

or maybe the end of '45--anyway, soon after the war was over, and Mort met them. They liked each other a lot, and with their left-wing views and concerns, it was a match. I stayed with my husband till 1948, and then we separated.

McCreery: Your daughter was about four then?

Blake: She was four. I had custody of her. Her father visited her, but on and off. But he was very faithful in sending a monthly support check. It was a friendly separation.

[tape interruption]

Wartime Employment

Blake: I had been working during the war, first for the Office of War Information and then for the local draft board. With the war over--I can't remember, but I was working all the time.

McCreery: Can you tell me something about the Office of War Information as you experienced it?

Blake: Yes. It was a branch of the Office of War Information, an important one because this was the West Coast. I remember local reporters would stop in quite frequently. It was meant to collect information and to distribute information, flyers and publications and posters and so on. And it was meant to make people more aware of activities that they could either engage in or help with that would help the war effort.

My boss was a very competent young woman who knew office work. I don't know how much she knew or cared about the fact that this was the Office of War Information. It was a job for her. One day she sent me to a cabinet in the back that was always kept locked. She gave me the key, and she asked me to get some file from there. I unlocked the drawer, and the first thing that hits my eye is a special file of Communists in Los Angeles! [laughter] So I locked the drawer again.

McCreery: What did you do?

Blake: Nothing. I think I told some people in my branch, my Communist Party branch, that such a file existed. But I didn't even look at it. The war effort, you know. It was all for the war effort. They really had the wrong number. We certainly

weren't a dangerous group, I assure you! So I continued to work after the war.

McCreery: You mentioned working at the draft board also? Can you talk a little about that?

Blake: When the Office of War Information--it wasn't shut down, but they could see the war winding down, but the draft boards continued because they had all these immense files, and people wanted to know their status and so on. I got a part-time job--I think three days a week--working there just to work on the files. They were really beginning to clear it out, but I could do the office work that they assigned to me. It was really one of the signs of the war coming to an end. I think it was also that the war in Japan was still going on when I got the job, so that involved--and they were still drafting some people into the army. They did after the war was over.

Then I got a job--it must have been an office job of some kind, but it was so unmemorable I can't even remember where it was or what I was doing! I was plugging around with these office jobs. I was not really a trained office worker and didn't like it much, but it was easy to get. I would carefully not mention that I had a college degree because that was not an advantage.

McCreery: Between that and your support from your ex-husband, you were able to care for yourself and your daughter adequately?

Blake: Yes, we managed. We were not living in luxury, I assure you, but I didn't expect that. We didn't have a car. I remember I would go someplace with my daughter. We'd come back and she'd say, "Oh, I'm so tired." I would say, "Oh, well, our yellow Rolls Royce is waiting for us." The yellow trams and buses in Los Angeles. But we managed. It was all right.

McCreery: What arrangements did you have for her while you were working?

Blake: When I first started, my next-door neighbor, who lived with her daughter, son-in-law, and grandson was taking care of the grandson, who was maybe a year older than Sylvia, than my daughter, so she agreed--for a small amount, really--to take care of my daughter, too. So that was very convenient. She was right next door. When I would go to work, Sylvia would go next door and play with the other kid, with Richard.

Then, when my parents came, they became--they really brought up my daughter. They were her saviors, her mentors,

her mental and physical nourishers. They were everything for her.

McCreery: It's a wonderful thing.

Blake: Yes. It was a close relationship.

McCreery: Did they live with you when they came out?

Blake: When they first came out, they did, and then I moved to a room with some friends. My daughter and I lived there. Then within a year or so, a couple of years, they bought a small bungalow in Los Angeles, and my daughter went to live with them. First I had the room, and then I rented a small apartment, all within walking distance of each other, so we stayed very close.

The Cold War Begins: "No Dreams"

McCreery: Now, I wonder, in that period right after the war, what plans did you have for yourself, if any, at that time? What were your dreams?

Blake: You know, I don't think I had any. I think I was just drifting. I was very active in political work. It was a tumultuous period in the Party because the top administration had come up with this idea that everything was going to be different after the war, that capitalism was going to be easy and benign, and that life would be marvelous, and that we wouldn't have to worry much about militant organization or protests or anything. I was uneasy with it, but I didn't have any other place to go, so I went along with it. Of course, it wasn't benign, and the Cold War set in very soon, and it was a whole different atmosphere.

The effects of the Cold War were pretty devastating. I guess the Party really wasn't philosophically ready for this new take on the world situation. I remember being very confused. I think that's what affected this--I don't know where I was going. I went to work. I took care of my kid. I kept friendships. I did donkey work in the Party. But it was not a settled, easy time.

McCreery: Well, there were so many changes happening all over. The whole period of recovery from the war, and people coming back and trying to reestablish themselves. I'm sure it was a time for many people of just adjusting. And, of course, on the national

scene you had [President] Harry Truman, and things were different with that leadership, of course.

Blake: Yes. It soon became evident, or at least to me it became evident, that not only was the leadership different in the national administration, but organizational leadership was different. The trade union movement had been shaken. They had won a number of significant victories, especially in the Depression years, and there was reason to hope that, with the G.I.s coming back and going to work in the industries of the country, that the labor movement was on the way up. And it turned out it was on the way down. Not immediately, but it was not a good time for left-wingers.

I don't know what else to say about that period.

McCreery: Just to carry that a little farther, of course, [Senator] Joseph McCarthy's Communist hunt started around 1950 and so on. I wonder what effect that had on you as time went on.

Blake: I remember the fifties as the worst decade of my life, even worse than the war period, and that was bad. The fifties, as you say, began with significant and pretty dreadful attacks on the whole left-wing movement, and the left-wing movement fell apart, too. There was immense dissension between Socialists and Communists and labor and uncommitted people, all of whom--we had been allies for a decade, and suddenly we were at each other's throats. The McCarthyites made good use of this, to separate us even farther.

One example of the effects of the Cold War. There were a number of jobs opening. In the fifties I could have gotten a job as a teacher, but I wouldn't take a loyalty oath, so I didn't even try. That's one reason that I was in these crummy office jobs; they didn't require loyalty oaths, just work. The most dramatic part personally was what was happening to Mort, who had--well, you tell her. This is important in my life.

Mort Newman's Postwar Period

Newman: Well, I came back from the army, from Manila, and very shortly became vice president of the largest bedding manufacturing company on the West Coast, which was part of how far I had fallen for this idea of how everything was going to be.

Blake: My comrade, the capitalist.

Newman: It took me about a year and a half to get over that and begin refocusing, at which point I resigned as vice president of the bedding manufacturing outfit and sold a house that I had bought and bought a \$3,500 house perched on the side of a hill and told the Party that I wanted to become active--you know, in an active position. I guess was assigned as a section organizer in Los Angeles of the Party then. But that was part of the kind of process that people went through--in part self-inflicted, but that was what was happening.

Then, of course, with this wave of McCarthyism and what preceded it--for example, in Los Angeles, there was a contrived United States investigation through a grand jury proceeding, and they called people like me to testify before the grand jury. They would ask you, "What's your name?" You would tell them your name. "Where do you live?" or something. And then, "Would you please give us the names and addresses of all the people who are in the Communist Party?" At which point you would say, "No, I won't." Then you would go before a judge. In my case, I went before the judge after this, and the judge had written down, "He should be given a year in a federal penitentiary."

Blake: A year and a day, so you lose your voting rights.

Newman: A year and a day. So he's looking at me. Incidentally, one of the heads of the Communist Party told me, "Tell him about your relationship to Robert Newman. It may help you." I wasn't keen on it, but I did anyway, and he looked up, and he said, "They were troublemakers then, too."

So he reads, "A year and a day," and he looks up at me, and he says, "And a \$2,500 fine." All right. So, fine. That's okay with me. So I go back to jail, and I tell them what had happened. Of course, in jail you immediately find a lot of lawyers. "I hope they send you to so-and-so because that's a great penitentiary." And another says, "No, no. This penitentiary." You get expert advice along this line.

And then the thing happened, very interesting. Because I happened to have a good lawyer, this lawyer knew that the judge could not give me both time in jail and a dollar fine. This very judge had been reversed on this by the Supreme Court about three years before, and it was just his foolish mistake because my lawyer immediately paid the \$2,500 fine, so I was out free and clear. But for a year the judge wouldn't admit or correct --I was free and clear, but the judge wouldn't technically let me off the hook. But finally there was so much laughter at every legal proceeding that he went to that he finally decided.

Blake: So while Mort is up in a cell in the city hall building or wherever it was, I'm down with a bunch of people, protesting and carrying picket signs and objecting to what was going on. It was a rotten time.

Factory Work, 1950s

[Interview 3: February 7, 2000] ##

Blake: I had talked before about being kind of adrift in office jobs and finally decided that what I really needed to do to stay true to my roots was just to go get a job in a factory and work on the line and experience life as it should be. There was a company--I can't even remember the name of it now; they're long out of existence--but they were making little tiny parts for automobiles. None of us really knew where our work ended up. Once, when I asked, I was quickly told, "That's none of your concern. You just do your job."

In order to get the job in this company, you had to take an elaborate set of tests, an IQ test and a manual skills test and all kinds of tests, which I dutifully went through, and the reason was that they paid better than many of these factory jobs paid, especially to women.

McCreery: Do you remember what year this was?

Blake: This was in the fifties, '54 maybe, something like that. They were organized by the United Automobile Workers union, which is one of the reasons they paid better, and I vividly remember what the pay was, a dollar and a quarter an hour, which was significantly better than almost any other job that I could have gotten at the time.

So they put me on a drill press, and for a year and a half I'm diligently working, drilling little holes into little parts, the end result of which I never learned. You had a quota. They kept you up to the mark. And I'm doing fine and getting along on the job. Suddenly, after a year and a half, I'm called into the--not my immediate boss, not the foreman, but the head of the department. I'm called into his office, and when I get there, he tells me that I'm being dismissed; I'm being fired. And I said, "Why? My record is good." He said, "You lied on your employment application." I said, "I lied? How did I lie?" He said, "Well, you said, where it asks for education, you said you had graduated from high school, and you

didn't mention that you had graduated from college." So I said, "I didn't think a college education was necessary or an important asset to a drill press operator's job." He said, "Nevertheless, you lied."

Well, obviously, that wasn't the reason. I went to my union shop steward and explained what had happened, and she took it on to the union, and we had an arbitration hearing. There it came out why I was fired. It had nothing to do with lying on my employment application. They had discovered somehow--they could easily have discovered it because I didn't keep it a secret--that I was a member of, that I had joined the Civil Rights Congress. Of course, that was considered kind of dangerous, I guess, to be interested enough in civil rights to join an organization.

I was not an officer; I was just a member of this organization, and they said, "Well, we make parts for the government, and so you're a security risk." The union hired a good lawyer for me. He worked hard on this. But the arbitrator decided in favor of the company, so I was out.

McCreery: What did you do?

Blake: Well, I went and got another job at a factory that made locks. I was okay there. I worked there for a couple of years. But I had an interesting experience there. One of the women whom I worked with on the assembly line--one day on our break, we were both drinking coffee together, an African American woman--and she said, "Fay, what are you doing here?" I said, "I'm doing what you're doing. I'm supporting my kid, and I'm trying to pay the rent." And she said, "Yeah, I know that, but I'm here because I have to be. This is the only kind of job I can get. But you know that's not true for you."

I said, "Well, what should I do?" She said, "Quit. Go get a job that suits your past, your background, and do the best you can for yourself and for your daughter." And I thought she made so much sense--it was for my benefit she was telling me this, not for hers--that I did. I quit, and I got a job in a furniture factory. I worked as a bookkeeper. I had never been a bookkeeper, but you picked it up, and it was okay for a while. It was not really what I wanted to do, but neither was working on the assembly line, putting locks together. So it was kind of a time of drift for me.

McCreery: How much of a surprise was her idea that you get out and do something a little better?

Blake: I was surprised because I didn't think that the women--I got along very well with the women that I worked with there, but I didn't think that they cared enough, that they were concerned enough about what I did, whether what I did was suitable. She did make one little wry comment, but it was with a laugh. She said, "I know you're active in the union." It was organized with the machinists union. "You're active in the union and go to all the meetings, and I know you have ideas about what should be done, and I agree with your ideas, but let us do it ourselves. It's not for you to do." I realized it was good of her to tell me so honestly that I was an intruder. I wasn't helping them by being there. A good experience.

McCreery: It's nice that you were able to hear what she was saying.

Blake: Well, I worked with her, and I was interested in their welfare, but I didn't know that they were interested in my welfare [laughs], and that was nice to hear.

McCreery: You had mentioned to me in another session that you did not want to get a teaching job because one had to sign a loyalty oath at that time. But is it accurate to say you really had not explored other things or thought about them too much?

Blake: No, I hadn't thought about them too much. That was the time that Mort--when I told him the story about what had happened in the factory--he began to kind of push me a little and say, "Look, you have this background. You have a degree. See what you can do with it." I said, "Well, you know, I can't be a teacher. I'm not going to sign a loyalty oath." He said, "Well, there are other jobs. Go explore."

Starting Library School at USC

Blake: His daughter had worked as an aide in the library, and she had talked to her boss there, and Mort said, "Go to the campus, to USC [University of Southern California]. Go to the English Department--that's what you have your degree in--but go see what the library school is about. That might be something for you."

That was in '56, I guess it was. So I went. I took a day off from work. I had made appointments with the dean of the English department and with the head of the library school, Dr. Martha Boaz, at USC. I think I went to a couple of other

departments, too, but I can't remember those interviews. But those were interesting interviews.

When I talked to the dean of the English Department, I said, "Tell me honestly. If I get a master's in English, what would I be able to do with it? What kind of job would I get?" He said, "Well, you could teach high school English, of course." I said, "I can't, because of the loyalty oath." He said, "Well, you could probably teach dumb-head English at some private school." I said, "Thanks a lot. I don't want to teach dumb-head English."

So then I went for the interview with Dr. Boaz, and she was very enthusiastic. She said, "Oh, there are hundreds of library jobs going. As soon as you get your degree you'll have a job waiting for you." There were all kinds of choices you could make. So I said, "Okay." At USC it was kind of geared to people who were working, so you could take courses on Saturdays, you could take evening courses, and you didn't have to register for full-time courses. You could be working and be working toward your degree at the same time.

So I registered and began. I found library school just dreadful. It was the most boring thing. There were a lot of interesting topics that could have been explored, but most of it was so routine and so--I realized from the very beginning that cataloging was not going to be for me, even though I had a very good teacher who was interested in ideas but who said, "You have to learn the basics of cataloging." So I learned the basics, but I knew I wasn't going to go ask for a cataloger's job.

But I began to be interested--there were some topics that I thought might make the library a good place for me, beyond loving reading, you know, all my life.

McCreery: Can you give me an example of the topics that interested you?

Blake: Yes. Well, of course, taking courses with Dr. [Robert D.] Harlan, with Bob Harlan, was one of the things that set me off. I think it was his first year of teaching at the library school, and he was as bored as I was with things like cataloging and stuff like that. But he began to present some topics that piqued my interest--not entirely, but that he was interested in. Like, he was interested in the history of books, how we came to have books at all, and to what uses books are put at various levels. That was an interesting kind of thing.

Publishing in *Library Journal*

Blake: Then, while I was in library school, I wrote an article. It started as a paper, but I submitted a different paper. But I wrote an article on the failure of public libraries to provide information and materials to trade unions. We had many libraries all over the country which had whole areas devoted to business, to helping business. Every library in the country subscribed to business journals and business reference books, but not to labor. Labor was just put off as one of the social sciences, I guess.

I wrote the article, and I checked it out--I think maybe it was with Dr. Harlan or maybe with somebody else, some other professor there. I submitted it to the *Library Journal*. The *Library Journal* thought that I was on the faculty at USC, and they got in touch with me and said they wanted to publish it and, as a matter of fact, they were going to interview various librarians around the country about what do we do about service to labor?

Well, it came out. It was published, and I quickly told them, "Look, I'm not a faculty member. I don't even have my degree yet in library science"--science! Some science! [laughter] But they had become very interested, and it made a little bit of a stir. It was published, and they interviewed about five librarians around the country, one of whom actually did service to unions, and there were special libraries that the unions themselves had to set up. For this article I had interviewed people in various unions and asked them, "What can a public library be doing for trade unions that would make it a source of information?"--because I knew that trade unions never went to the public library. There was nothing there for them. So that kind of made a little bit of a splash.

I began to realize that librarianship could be turned into --you'd have to work hard at it, but it could be turned into a really responsive profession--it aroused my interest in what could public libraries be doing for people whom they were not serving at the moment. The general service was to the middle class and to students, but there were whole categories of people whom the public libraries had never served and continued not to serve. I thought that might be an area where I might be able to contribute.

McCreery: I know that ended up being a long-term interest of yours.

Blake: Yes, it continued to be.

McCreery: Now, I wonder, did the USC curriculum and program have any particular emphasis on training public librarians, or do you know what they were mainly designed to do at that time?

Blake: I was more encouraged to go into academic librarianship, which I did, because it offered me--I'll tell you about that in a minute--but they did offer courses that were particularly concerned with the public library, and I took all of those, even though I didn't become a librarian in a public library until much later. So I give credit to the USC library school for piquing my interests and answering some of the questions and doubts that I had.

McCreery: How many students were in that program then, do you recall?

Blake: No, I don't recall. It was several hundred, I'm sure. First of all, it was the only library school in Los Angeles. The UCLA library school didn't start till later. The other library schools in California were UC Berkeley, of course, and San Jose. I don't remember any others. There may have been others, but--

McCreery: I think not, at that time.

Blake: At that time, yes. It was the only one that offered--and the fact that they made it possible for people who were working to work through their degree.

McCreery: I'm interested in the article you wrote, not only because you were yourself a student but because you had never worked in a library.

Blake: No, I had never worked in a library. As a matter of fact, I applied for a part-time job at the Los Angeles Public Library, and they had a loyalty oath. I told the interviewer I was perfectly willing to sign it but truthfully, to say that I had been a member of the Communist Party but was not any longer. And they said, "No, that's not good enough." I wouldn't lie on it, on the oath, whatever it was. That was still in force at that time.

McCreery: What kind of a response did your article have in the library community?

Blake: Oh, there were letters galore. I got a lot of fun out of that. I think the editor did, too. The letters, pro and con and no, that's not an area that we should be--we're not trying to serve everybody. We're trying to serve particular parts of the

population--which was very true, but not the parts that they thought they were serving.

Then there were articles supporting the idea--that *is* an area that the public libraries should be involved in. Of course, that gave rise to the beginnings, just the beginnings of the idea, well, there are other areas, other parts of the population that we don't serve well.

I did another article. The *Library Journal* said that it was too touchy to publish at that time. You know, this was before the civil rights movement. I took two public library branches that I was very well acquainted with, the Hollywood Public Library and the South Vernon Public Library--one which was predominantly in a middle-class or upper middle-class, white area; and the other one, where the population was heavily African American, but they didn't use the library. It had no particular outreach to them.

I compared what the collection policy was and what their attendance was and who was using it. The one in South Los Angeles was used primarily by high school students, who would do their homework there. But it was not appealing to the needs of that community. And, of course, there wasn't a single black librarian anywhere in the city.

I submitted the article, but the editor told me personally that it was too touchy for that moment. Later on it became an important area, but it was too late for this particular article, so that didn't get published. But it was fun writing it and researching it.

Developing Ideas About Libraries; USC's Curriculum

McCreery: It sounds as if you were ahead of your time in a sense. To what extent had the library profession considered these issues of serving the business culture well but not other cultures? Do you know?

Blake: I hunted for materials. I never found--there was one librarian in the public library in New York who made it her particular area to provide service to working people and to unions, but she was the only one I ever ran into at that period who was at all interested in this aspect of librarianship. The idea was that, oh, well, special libraries do it for the unions. Well, what about people who are union members but don't want

specialized stuff but want materials that have something to do with their lives? Well, no, it doesn't warrant special services.

I'll give you an example. Much, much later--I had already been a librarian for years, and I was at the [UC Berkeley] library school. I went to a meeting in which the then-head of the San Francisco Public Library was a speaker. He said that there had been some earthquake damage to a branch in Chinatown, or near Chinatown, and that gave them a good opportunity, not only to refurbish the building but refurbish its services. This was in the eighties, maybe. I checked into this, and the city of San Francisco up to that point had never bought and paid for a single book in Chinese. All of the books in Chinese, even in the Chinatown branch, had been donated by the Chinese community. The library had never bought it. It was not their purview.

McCreery: Who was the head of San Francisco Public then?

Blake: I don't remember. Actually, it was a guy whom I liked a lot. I thought he was a good librarian.

McCreery: But that's fascinating that the Chinese community was serving itself, to some extent, because the city was not.

Blake: Well, they provided the building, and they gave some help, but it was not considered a priority of theirs to develop the Chinese collection. That has changed a lot since then, but that was an example.

McCreery: Tell me some more about your general impressions of USC when you arrived there as a student.

Blake: I'll give another example. When I arrived, I had to make out an application form. Everybody who came as a student had to do that. And it asked for religion, so I left it blank. They called me down and said, "You left this blank." I said, "Well, I don't have any religion. There's nothing I can put in there." I think for the first semester that I was there, I was called in regularly, at least once a month, to fill in what religion I was. Finally I just put a mark there to show that I'd seen it; I hadn't just inadvertently left it out but that I didn't care to answer that.

I had a librarian working with me when I was at UCLA, at the UCLA library, and he told me he had the same experience. He wouldn't put in religion, and finally in exasperation he put in--I don't know--what were the people who built Stonehenge?

Druids? He put that in as his religion. As long as it was filled in, they accepted it. Of course, you realize USC began as a church-connected school, so--but to continue with that year after year was an example of SC.

I found it very sectarian, very snobbish, with no reason--it was just pretentious snobbishness. They had no reason to be that snobbish. The football team was more important than the library school. I was not very happy there, but it was giving me the kind of education and degree that I wanted, so it worked out okay.

McCreery: As you say, USC was a private institution, originally a religious one. Now, how did you pay for your education there?

Blake: With money! With money that I was earning. I was working on a bookkeeper's job all day every day.

McCreery: And, as you say, you could go evenings and weekends?

Blake: Weekends, yes, which I did. I used part of what I was making--by this time, my bookkeeper's job was paying fairly well. I was earning--I remember vividly the pay cut I had to take when I took my first librarian's job. As a full-charge bookkeeper, I was earning the equivalent of I think it was about \$150 a week. When I got my first job at UCLA, I was earning \$415 a month. So I took a cut.

I remember my boss in the furniture company where I was bookkeeper--I told him that I'd be leaving, and he said, "Why? Do you want a raise? I'll give you a raise." I said, "No, I'll be leaving because I'm going to take a job as a librarian." He said, "Oh, a librarian." He, by the way, was illiterate. He could just sign his name. But he was a millionaire! So I said, "I'm going to take a job as a librarian at the university." "Oh, very nice. What will you be making?" I said, "Four hundred fifteen a month." He said, "You're crazy."

McCreery: That was a pay cut of something like a third. Well, you were at USC, then, from 1956 to '61?

Blake: Sixty-one. You can see it took that long because I was only taking part-time courses.

McCreery: The degree offered was the M.S. in library science. You already made one joke about the term "science." Was there any discussion of that at that time, do you recall, the affiliation with science?

Blake: There was some discussion. It was kind of a holy subject. It was hard to broach it with those people who were desperately trying to give it status. My idea was you had to earn the status. If you call yourself a scientist, you should be in science. Don't call yourself a science, but make yourself the best, the most valued profession that you can, and on that base, becoming a professional. But it was not well accepted at the library school at USC because they were having problems with the rest of--they didn't measure up to either the football team or the science department, so it was never a very welcomed subject. It was not discussed very openly.

McCreery: Now, do you recall whether you had any chances to take elective courses in that program, or was it fairly well prescribed?

Blake: It was fairly well prescribed. It was not until towards the end that I did take some elective courses. I insisted on taking public library courses, even though I had an idea that I'd probably go into university librarianship, mostly because if I could get the job at UCLA, I wanted to go on and get an additional degree. They gave you both time off and free tuition to take additional degrees, so that looked like a better chance to do what I was ultimately going to try to do.

If I went into a public library, there was some chance I could do some of these programs that I was by this time pretty passionately interested in. There was no guarantee that I would, but there was some chance. On the other hand, there was more of a chance to push this if I took an additional degree, if I went into the faculty of a library school, and it turned out that it did work that way.

But there were elective courses that I could and did take. I knew I wasn't going to do anything with the history of the book, but I took the course because I was fascinated by it and enjoyed it very much. I can't remember the others, but there were some elective courses that I did enjoy.

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McCreery: We were just finishing up talking about your program in librarianship at USC. It's nice that you knew Professor Harlan, who was later your colleague here, of course. Are there other faculty members who stand out? You mentioned Dr. Boaz. Can you tell me a little more about her?

Blake: Well, one of the things that was interesting and important about her was she was one of the few women in leadership. I discovered that very early, that 80 percent of all librarians

were women but none of them were in any kind of leadership. They were not the heads of libraries. They were not the heads of faculties in library schools. They were kind of the water girls of the profession. For a woman to have made it to the top was a credit to her. She was much more married to the upper middle-class aspirations of library schools than I cared to be, but it was good to have a woman there at the head.

Dr. Winkler was my cataloging teacher. As I said, I never took to cataloging, but I thought him a very interesting man. For one thing, he read books; he didn't just catalog them. [laughter] We had one professor, whose name I can't remember-- I guess I don't want to remember--who was completely dedicated to the business ethic, or lack of ethic. He was concerned only with how libraries could become private libraries, privately-funded libraries. A lot of the faculty, like a lot of the students, were only part time because they didn't have to pay them as much and because they just taught the particular course that they were best qualified for.

McCreery: They probably had day jobs, too.

Blake: Yes, I'm sure they did. That's about all I remember about it. It was not one of the great schools I ever attended.

Librarian at UCLA, 1961-1970; Concurrent Ph.D. Studies

McCreery: I see here that the year you finished at USC, 1961, is the same year that you went to work at UCLA, so why don't you tell me how things proceeded for you, according to your plan that you'd devised for yourself.

Blake: Yes. Well, I interviewed with a number of libraries. One that interested me was out in Whittier, a public library, and I told them what I was concerned with. They were interested in that. They said there would be room for that, so I held that in reserve if I didn't get the UCLA job.

I interviewed for a job at the Torrance branch of the Los Angeles Public Library, and I thought that would be perfect because it was right in the heart of a working-class district and there would be a chance--but the person whom I interviewed with wasn't interested in that at all and said no, that wasn't what they wanted out of their branch. So that didn't have a very high place.

But I really wanted that job at UCLA, so I could get another degree. When I got that job--incidentally, they had had a loyalty oath for that job, but by 1961 it had been ruled unconstitutional, so you only had to--I think you had to swear that you were not now a member, which was true. I was not any longer a member, and so I qualified for the UCLA job.

McCreery: The benign version of the oath.

Blake: Yes, yes. And then they did away with it entirely. But almost simultaneously I took the job at UCLA and I registered for courses for another degree, for a master's in English.

McCreery: You said you kind of had that in mind. When did you start thinking about going on in English as well?

Blake: When I had that interview with the head of the English department at USC, it occurred to me--that isn't all that people with an advanced degree in English can do, that you were prepared to teach, but also to develop educational ideas. So maybe if I got an advanced degree and used that in library work--I was kind of committed to library work by that time--that it was always honored and valued in libraries, I noticed, the kinds of degrees and how many degrees you had. So it would serve that purpose. I was kind of headed for maybe some of the ideas that were just germinating about what libraries should be.

So I started with working towards a degree in English, a master's degree in English. As it developed, I decided that, well, I might as well keep going and see if I could make it through the Ph.D.

McCreery: So you continued throughout the sixties.

Blake: I continued throughout the sixties, yes. I got my Ph.D. in 1970.

McCreery: But the first part of that was getting the job at UCLA, is that right? How did you find out about that job?

Blake: Oh, well, they were recruiting very actively. You know, libraries were expanding in the beginning of the sixties, and they were actively recruiting. They came to the [USC] campus, and I met with a number of the people who were hiring librarians. So I met with somebody from UCLA with whom I discussed the job, and I was hired quickly.

"Gifts and Exchange" in UCLA Library's Acquisitions Department

McCreery: Now, you became head of Gifts and Exchange [a section of the acquisitions department of UCLA Library]. Did you start there?

Blake: I started in Gifts and Exchange, but not head. I was just working there. That became fascinating because soon after I started there, I began to see the possibility for expanding that. It was just a little backwater of the library. It was a way to exchange University of California Press publications with other university presses elsewhere. That was a good idea. Instead of a monetary arrangement, just to exchange press publications with other presses.

But I began to see, especially in the sixties, that this was a golden opportunity. There were all these new countries coming into being who desperately needed books but didn't have U.S. cash to pay for them. There were countries in the beginnings of the Cold War, countries with whom we had no trade agreements or who couldn't afford to buy American publications but were desperate for them. And they had publications that we were eager to get. You didn't walk into a bookstore and buy a Chinese medical journal. There was only one way you could get it.

So the head of the acquisitions department at that time at UCLA--I went to discuss it with him, and he liked the idea, and he said, "Well, let's explore it. Let's see what's possible." He said, "Maybe it's illegal to exchange books with the University of Beijing, but let's find out." He took the trouble to call the State Department, to call the appropriate people to talk to and get agreements from them. Even where there were prohibitions of trade, there was no prohibition about sending books or receiving books. The prohibition with Cuba, for example, which still persists, is that you can't go and spend American money there, but you can exchange books. I set up an exchange with Cuba, a very active exchange with Cuba.

I had the most fun in the whole world because I began--when I became head of the Gifts and Exchange section--my boss transferred to another job--I could hire a secretary who was fluent in Russian. She could type, but I got a special typewriter for her, and she and I connived together to write to Russian universities, to academies--you know, we hunted up all kinds of them, and asked them if they were interested in exchange, that we would send them--well, first it just started we would send them University of California publications in exchange for theirs.

And then--I don't know where this idea started, but it was from some little operation that had been going on, of a barter exchange, that it didn't have to be university publications. We would buy the books and magazines, periodicals that they needed and send them or have them sent, and in exchange we would give them lists of what we wanted from them. So no money ever changed hands. It was a barter, literally, truly a barter exchange.

I started with the Russians. Then it was easy to develop that into every country in the world which had problems with either sending money or spending money but which had publications, that we could develop barter exchanges. At that time the acquisitions department kept a record, duplicate copies of letters that went out from the whole acquisitions department, and it was circulated throughout the department. The Gifts and Exchange section's store of letters would always be three or four times more than whatever every other group in the acquisitions department would send out, because we were sending them all over the world.

Then began one of the most--it's so heartbreaking to me now, but one of the most effective barter exchanges we began to develop was with these newly independent countries all through Africa. As a country became independent, it was obvious that they were going to be putting out government publications and university publications, that they didn't have money to get our publications but they'd be delighted to send theirs in barter exchange for ours.

I remember one of the most fascinating things was we also decided we would send our letter offering barter exchanges to political parties in the various countries in Africa. And there was one--I wish I could remember what it was, but I can't--there was one where we had written the initial letter, and then we had a tickler file--you know, every three months or so if they hadn't answered, we would write again.

There was one--we had written about three times, there was no reply, and it was kind of getting under my skin: How come they're not replying? Finally, one day I get a call from the Los Angeles airport. They have a huge package for us, for the Gifts and Exchange department of the UCLA library, and could we possibly come and have somebody pick it up? So I sent one of our drivers to pick it up. I had no idea what this was. It was a package of publications from this country, and along with it came a letter on engraved stationery from the prime minister of the country, who had just been elected or appointed or whatever it was--prime minister.

It was the country that I had tried for so long to get an exchange with. I had written to him when he was the head of or in the local political party. He was now prime minister, and he was responding, and we got truckloads of material that would go to our government publications department at UCLA. They were priceless because nobody else had them.

One time I got a call from the library at Harvard University. "We understand you have somehow developed an exchange with the academy of sciences and the university in Beijing. How do you do it? And can you? Is it legal?"

McCreery: Well, I was wondering if there was any precedent for what you were doing at any other university?

Blake: No, not that I'm aware of, because I was beginning to get communications from other university libraries. How do you work this out? Not all of them were interested. You know, a lot of university libraries were more limited in their collecting policies, but UCLA at that time was just beginning to explode. We'd gotten lots of funds. We were rich. We were developing. And we were eager. You know, the biomedical department would call me and say, "Hey, I understand that the academy of sciences in Moscow is putting out this new medical journal. Can you get hold of it?" This was the way to get hold of it. I developed big correspondences with countries all over the world.

Then, in addition to my secretary who spoke Russian, I had a librarian who was fluent in French and Basque. He was a Basque. So he would take over the French correspondence and get exchanges started there. A number of the African countries, French was their language. Then I had a librarian, an immigrant from Cuba, so she still had her tentacles out, and she did a lot of this spade work to develop the exchanges. It was such a challenge.

I worked closely with our periodicals department, because we had a librarian there who's internationally famous now, Sanford Berman. I don't know if you've heard of him. Well, he and I worked together on this project, and he would look up these places that wanted exchanges, and then I would develop them. At the same time, we were also developing all kinds of gift arrangements with people who didn't necessarily have or want an exchange but who had publications that we were interested in--you know, offbeat kind of publications.

McCreery: So the gift side was simply to receive things. No exchange was involved.

Blake: Right. Where they didn't want an exchange or didn't have the means for an exchange but would send us materials that we were interested in.

McCreery: Do you have a ready example?

Blake: Yes. One example was I ran across a publication that was issued by a group of--this was the time, soon after Pope John XXIII had developed a whole new approach by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church towards the third world. There were a group of priests in Chicago who were working on some of the program that he suggested and were also forming themselves into a union, a trade union of priests!

Well, I don't know how I got hold of that--maybe Sandy found it or something--and I had an example of one of their leaflets that they'd issued, and I wrote to them and asked them if we could regularly get whatever they put out. They wrote back immediately, sending what they had, and they said, "We'll have to hunt up the first ones because we never kept copies of them. We didn't think a library would want them." But they did find them. They made photocopies. So we had a complete run of their publications. No other library that I know of ever had a priests' trade union publication.

There were a number of organizations and--it was the beginning of a very fruitful time. You know, the civil rights movement, the Free Speech Movement up here. It was a time with a great deal of concern and interest in areas that hadn't been public before and that we made it our business in the library to collect, one way or another. We even paid for some of them, but not very many.

McCreery: Now, were there any limitations, financial or otherwise, on what you were doing?

Blake: I suppose there were, but the acquisitions department--as I said, this was a period when we were quite rich, and a lot of what we were doing didn't require that much money. To start with, we would send University of California publications, which didn't cost us anything. That just came to the library. But as we got a lot more business, there were charges. But I never felt any terrible budget restrictions. We had a budget, and we stayed within it, but it was generous. Many of my colleagues were very cooperative and helpful and as excited as I was about this, so it was a good time to be working there.

The UCLA Library; Appointment Status of Academic Librarians

McCreery: Tell me some more about the larger picture of the library at UCLA at that time.

Blake: The library at UCLA--we were always kind of a poor relation of the library here, at UC Berkeley. Many of these exchanges, these barter exchanges we developed--originally, all exchanges at UCLA library had to be arranged through the UC Berkeley library. We'd have to write to the UC Berkeley exchange librarian, tell her where we wanted an exchange, and she would do the follow-up on it. Well, finally I went to talk to my boss, and I said, "This is really a slow way to do this." I had big plans to make it even bigger! "We should have an amicable divorce from UC Berkeley."

He said, "You may be right. I'll tell you what: Go up there. Arrange a session with them. Go up and talk to them, and see what you can arrange or what is a good likelihood." I came up. The exchange librarian was delighted! She didn't want all this extra work. She had enough work setting up exchanges for the UC Berkeley library. She said, "Of course."

McCreery: Who was that? Do you remember?

Blake: No. But she was, like most of my colleagues--librarians, when their imaginations are turned on, are really very good people. She was delighted with the idea. She said, "By all means go back and tell your boss. We won't take offense. Let's have this divorce and set you up on your own." So that eased a lot of paperwork and red tape, and that became an important part of the work of my section.

The library was becoming truly a great academic library. Some of the departmental libraries became first class. The biomedical library, I remember vividly and distinctly, started with kind of an offshoot of UC Berkeley but became a first-class library on its own. The periodicals department exploded, and the government publications department became an important asset. Scholars would come from other libraries to consult our, by this time, very rich resource.

So it was great fun working there. It was a good place to develop what I thought libraries should be about.

McCreery: Now, do you know, were there other ways that that library was still tied to Berkeley?

Blake: Maybe at the upper, top levels, but I wasn't interested in administration, so I didn't ask questions about that. There must have been some kind of overall relationship because there's a president of the university, after all. We always were in some awe--I still am in some awe--of the UC Berkeley libraries. They were topnotch. But UCLA needed to develop its own resources, and to share them, of course. But we needed to be freer than we had been, and they let us. They set us free.

McCreery: You mentioned that the administration at UCLA was supportive of what you were doing. How effective was the administration of the overall library at that time? Do you have much of a sense of that?

Blake: Yes. There were two people. The director of the library was Robert G. Vosper, and his righthand woman was Page Ackerman, and she was first-class, a really fine librarian. I didn't have much contact with Vosper because he was in the upper echelon, but with Page I was in almost daily contact. She understood what we were trying to do, and she pushed it along. I remember one little incident with her: She suggested that it might be good for our image and the other people in the Gifts and Exchange department--became members of the faculty club or faculty dining hall or whatever it was, which was limited to faculty.

Well, when Clark Kerr was president of the university, he had issued a ukase of some kind, with no rhyme or reason, that librarians were to be considered faculty. We didn't get the perks of faculty, we didn't get tenure, we didn't get anything that faculty got, but that we would be called faculty.

McCreery: So yours became an academic appointment?

Blake: Well, that's what he thought, but he didn't do anything to implement it. So I applied to have dining privileges in the faculty club, and I got back an answer that we weren't eligible because we weren't really faculty. So I took it to Page, and she blew a fuse. She took it from there. I don't know what kind of strings she pulled, but I was considered eligible, that I could join the faculty club, and then I refused! I said, "There are other places I can eat. I don't have to go there."

McCreery: The principle was upheld.

Blake: Yes, yes, yes. Well, by this time we were deeply involved in true faculty status for academic librarians, and some of the state college libraries had developed this. They got faculty status. They were appointed as faculty. I don't know if they

got tenure, but they had some kind of security of employment, and they got the perks and privileges of--never the pay--but the perks and privileges of faculty. But the University of California never succumbed to that. I don't know whether they have it even now. I'm not sure. Do they have faculty status, true faculty status?

McCreery: I don't know.

Blake: I don't either.

McCreery: At the top levels I think they do.

Blake: Oh, yes.

McCreery: I'm not sure how far down it comes among rank-and-file librarians.

Blake: I think not, yes.

McCreery: Who was leading the fight to raise that issue of academic appointment?

Blake: Well, the American Library Association [ALA] got involved in it, and there were a number of librarians at the state college libraries who were actively working for us, and a few of us at the university libraries were involved, through the ALA and the CLA, California Library Association.

Librarians Association of the University of California (LAUC)

McCreery: Were you involved in that librarians' group, the UC-wide librarians group?

Blake: Oh, yes, I was one of the originators of it. We began to think that a universitywide organization of librarians, which had never existed--that this might be an important element first in this battle for faculty status, but even more important than that, that librarians as a group had interests in common and that we should organize all of the librarians at the university, who would meet regularly and who would take up the issues of the libraries and the librarians.

So we first called a meeting of librarians at--how many campuses were there then? About six? Something like that. Called a meeting, but it was outside of working hours, and it

was not an officially recognized group. It became evident that all of the campuses were giving support to such an organization. So a very good friend of mine, who was a librarian here at UC Berkeley, became--we had elections. We formally organized. He became the president, and I was the secretary of this grouping. [The Librarians Association of the University of California, LAUC]

McCreery: Who was he?

Blake: Eldred [R.] Smith. I don't know where he is now. I have long lost touch with him. We began to develop a program that would be of importance to--like, exchanging information among the campuses--the librarians among the campuses, and maybe developing it into a mechanism for better conditions for librarians, for university librarians. I don't think it ever became very much of that. I became more interested in a union of librarians, where that would be the main function of it, to put up a good strong fight for conditions and wages. Wages of librarians never kept up with what the faculty was getting or with other parts of the campus.

The librarians here at UC Berkeley did establish a union. I think they still have one. But at UCLA it never worked. It wasn't acceptable.

McCreery: I wonder why you think it didn't work.

Blake: Well, I think there's a kind of snobbishness. You know, you're called a professional, so what have you got in common with truck drivers or people on an assembly line? The question of class among library personnel--it's never talked about, but it's very much underneath the surface. Librarians would like to think of themselves as middle class, with middle-class values, and being associated with the working class is beneath them. I think that probably had something to do with the fact that there was so little service to working-class people. They didn't know what working-class people needed, what would be useful to them.

Taking the Ph.D. in English at UCLA

[Interview 4: February 24, 2000] ##

McCreery: We were talking last time quite a lot about your time at UCLA, working in the Gifts and Exchange part of the acquisitions

department, and we also touched briefly--and I'd like to touch more today--on the fact that you were going through the Ph.D. program in English concurrently, that is, from 1961 through '70. How did you see that fitting in with your career plans, or where did you want the Ph.D. to lead for you?

Blake: Actually, I thought the Ph.D. program was pretty formalized and dryly academic. It wasn't the kind of thing I wanted, but there really wasn't any other place for me to go. I was concerned with libraries, and eventually it kind of occurred to me that a library school, as a place where new librarians are created, would be a good place to try out some things that I saw as missing from libraries and librarianship generally.

So since I had gotten my undergraduate degree in English and I now had the master's from the library school at USC, it seemed appropriate to try, to see what would happen if I went through the Ph.D. courses and to write the dissertation within the English department. I never believed, and I still don't believe, that librarianship warrants a Ph.D. It tries to move librarianship into some kind of academic stratosphere instead of what it really is, a service profession--or what it really should be, a service profession.

Anyway, I went through the coursework within the Ph.D. program and completed the coursework. I had some difficulty in convincing the faculty of UCLA in the English department that writing about strikes in the American novel was of any use at all; they couldn't see any connection between that and the Ph.D., but I finally convinced them that that's what I wanted to do, and they agreed that that's what I could do.

Library Administration Job in New York State

Blake: When I finished all the coursework and I was working on the dissertation, I had an offer of a position in New York State, working as--I guess it was an administrator, or I don't know what the actual title was. I thought it might be a good idea for me to make a move at that point.

So I went to Albany, took this job. It had some very interesting innovations or attempts at innovations. The idea eventually was to be that anybody in the state of New York, wherever they were--some little hamlet in the north or New York City--could have access to almost any book or any type of

material which was in a collection in a library in the state of New York.

Now, that's a great idea. It fits right in with what I have always had in mind, and I thought maybe working at the state education department would be a good thing for both me and for this program. It wasn't good for me, but it was good for the plan. I still think that it's a laudable attempt. I don't know how far it got after I left, but I know that there were people at the state education department in New York who were still pushing that.

I worked closely with the state education department and with the state library. One of the important things they thought might be pushed was to get university libraries to agree to work together with public libraries so that people who didn't have university credentials could still have access to some of the collections at the university libraries. Some of it, a small part of it, began to work while I was there.

But I only stayed about a year and a half. Administration is not my bag. I like actually to get my hands into the work, not to be telling other people, "You're not doing it right" or "This is the way you should be doing it." So I stayed about a year and a half and then left. My daughter had headed off to England. Her husband was going to teach in an elementary school in a town outside of Birmingham, and she was pregnant, and I thought it might be nice to be there when my first--first and only--grandchild was born.

Sojourn in England, 1970-1971

Blake: So my father, who was retired at this point, and I both headed for England, to this town called Walsall--godforsaken place!--and I thought it might be possible to get a job there for a year or so, but it was a time of retrenchment so there wasn't any job for me. But it was a very interesting experience. It was like--well, living in a town outside of London actually meant that all of us had to learn a new language, even though English was the official language! The differences in the two cultures were made much clearer than if we had been living in London.

I lived in Walsall with the family for about eight months, I think it was. My grandson was born there. Then my father and I both lived in London for another three or four months,

and then I returned to the United States. So that was another interesting point of view.

I was very much impressed with public library service and university library service in Britain, at that time. Madame [Prime Minister Margaret] Thatcher managed to practically destroy it, so that when we were there a few years ago, the library hours had been cut back, the collections had been cut back. She had really done a good hatchet job on it. But when I was there, it was a fine thing.

Oh, yes, Mort is reminding me--that's why it's so good to have him here! My daughter's experience: She came to Walsall. She was, I think, three or four months pregnant. My son-in-law had a job teaching, and he registered with the National Health Service for the two of them. The day they registered, on the doorstep appeared, delivered by the local milkman, a bottle of orange juice and a bottle of milk because she was pregnant. That was an example of the service of the National Health Service then. They also managed to cut that back quite a bit since then, I understand, but that was a very good example of the welfare state then that we thought was an advance in human relationship.

My grandson was born December 26th, 1970. Then I returned [to the U.S.].

Seeking a Library School Faculty Position

Blake: By that time, I was negotiating with both the Columbia University library school and the UC Berkeley library school for a job.

McCreery: When did that start, by the way?

Blake: It started while I was still overseas, while I was still in Walsall. I had written and gotten some replies. I had an invitation to speak at a librarians' meeting in New York City, so that was a chance to go and interview at Columbia. But I really wanted to come back to California. I'd really made the move. I had an appointment for interviews at the library school at UC, so I came back in '71. I came back in the spring, I think, and that fall I started here at the library school.

McCreery: But you initiated that process yourself, of interviewing both at Berkeley and Columbia?

Blake: Yes. I was interested by that time. I finished the dissertation and the formal Ph.D. degree came through in '70. I think it was while I was still overseas, I got a notice of that.

McCreery: Just curious. Did you have any thought of attempting to affiliate with the library school at UCLA?

Blake: I never applied there. I can't remember why.

McCreery: Did you have occasion to learn much about it?

Blake: Yes, I knew Lawrence Clark Powell quite well while I was working at UCLA and I was publishing quite a bit in the library periodicals. Every time one of my articles was published, the next morning he was at my desk to fight with me about it. No, he didn't agree! It was really very good.

But I can't remember why I didn't apply. I know I never applied there, but I can't remember why.

Aside on Lawrence Clark Powell, UCLA

McCreery: Okay, just wondering. Tell me a little more about Lawrence Clark Powell.

Blake: Oh. Actually, I don't think he was meant to be an administrator either. That was one of the things that we agreed on. But it was good for him to start the library school at UCLA. Not only did he have all kinds of new, innovative ideas, but he encouraged them from other people and from his staff, so that I could see, as the library school got started, that there would be some new things happening there under his leadership. He was an enthusiast and a good writer.

Our last contact with him was we wrote him, both of us, in Arizona, where he was living--New Mexico, wherever it was--because we had heard that he had been involved in the Upton Sinclair campaign [for California governor]. But he wrote back and said that he hadn't actually. He had done something, but there wasn't actually a big role that he played. But it was a very nice, very encouraging letter.

McCreery: You would have liked to interview him.

Blake: Yes. Had he been more receptive or--I think he really was just on the outskirts of the campaign. Some of the people he knew were actively involved, but he himself, I think, was not, so we never got a chance to interview him.

By the way, if you interview [Robert D.] Harlan: I think he had a good, close relationship with him.

McCreery: Okay, good. I'll be sure to keep that in mind. Yes, and I've heard mention before that administration might not have been his forte. You're not the first to suggest that. But I gather he did have someone to kind of run the place for him.

Blake: Well, you know, that was true in my experience of every library I ever had anything to do with and any library school I ever had anything to do with, that the nominal head was a man who wasn't an administrator, and the real workhorse was a woman who was executive secretary or floor cleaner or something but who did the real work. That was everywhere. It continued for years and years and years.

McCreery: Who are you thinking of in this case?

Blake: Well, what was her name? There was somebody whom I would go to when I wanted something really to be done. At the UCLA library, Robert Vosper was the head, the nominal head, and I'm sure he got all the perks and the money, but the one who really ran that library was Page Ackerman, a woman.

McCreery: Okay. I think we did talk about her briefly once before.

Blake: She was the one I would go to when I really wanted something done.

[tape interruption while street sweeper passes outside]

McCreery: Before we leave the subject of UCLA completely--I know I keep holding you back here--I know you just now made reference to the fact that you were writing articles for various library publications and that sometimes Lawrence Clark Powell would come and discuss them with you, shall we say? I did run across a particular article in *Wilson Library Bulletin* from January of 1969, "What's Happened to the Dream?"

Blake: That was when Bill [William R.] Eshelman was the editor of the *Bulletin*?

McCreery: You know, that I'm not sure. I was wondering if that would come back to you. I actually have a copy of it here.

Blake: I'll take a look.

McCreery: If that helps remind you. But you're essentially saying there 1969 or perhaps 1968, when you wrote this--why aren't we further along in integrating the library profession. I don't expect you to remember everything that was said in there. I'm bringing it up without any warning here, but I just wonder if you recall what kind of response this article got in the library community.

Blake: What I was saying was that the library universally had all these good intentions, so nobody would dream of attacking the article. I mean, it was saying all the things that everybody was supposed to believe in. The response, as usual, was not to do anything, not to change anything. But then there was an uproar in the American Library Association, under the leadership of E. J. Josey, who was my boss at Albany; that's why I went to that job. He and Clara Jones and some of the black librarians took up a very responsible and well-organized fight for true integration.

I remember once I wrote an article about the library in Mobile, Alabama. I once briefly lived in Mobile, Alabama, and the library was completely segregated. When the article was published in the *Library Journal*, there was a furious letter from somebody working at the Mobile Public Library. "We're doing our best, and we're trying hard." You know, but there was no evidence--maybe they were, but there was no evidence that it was succeeding at all. It was complete segregation, and it continued to be for long after--I was writing this in what, '69?

There had never been full integration of librarians in the American Library Association. There was a small percentage of black librarians generally, and a smaller percentage who were active in the American Library Association. But this was the beginning of a turnaround. Finally, Clara Jones was the first black librarian to be elected president of the ALA.

McCreery: I wonder how many others were agitating for this sort of change?

Blake: Well, there was always a small group of what?--left-wingers or "librarians for change" or something like that. It was always small, always vociferous. You know, it's like fighting a mass of molasses because nobody ever said, "No, no, no, the rights

of the Confederate flag. This is our heritage." Nobody was saying that. They just weren't doing anything!

McCreery: Okay. I'm just trying to get an idea of whether Fay Blake was out there all alone, or--

Blake: No, not alone, no. Librarians in general are fairly liberal and humane people. I was never alone, but I always felt as if I were pulling them, not being pushed. I'd rather have been pushed.

This is an example, not about librarians, but at UCLA I was going to lunch one noon. The Vietnam War had started, and there was one professor [Donald Kalish] standing alone, not saying a word--with just a sign opposing the Vietnam War. The next day or maybe the week after or whatever it was, I joined him, so there were two of us standing in line, opposing the Vietnam War. Nobody attacked us, nobody said, "You're a Commie traitor," but nobody did anything, either. It took a long time before--I think the Free Speech Movement here helped propel some people into enough courage to join it, and eventually it was a good-sized line of opposition. But the beginning was tough.

McCreery: That helps give me an idea.

Brief Employment at Los Angeles Public Library, 1970

McCreery: Just one last thing I want to ask you about before we concentrate fully on the Berkeley School of Librarianship. I note that you had a summer job in 1970 at the Los Angeles Public Library.

Blake: Oh, yes. This was just before I went to England. I had a couple of months before I would move to England, so I applied for a part-time--I mean, it was a full-time job but just I knew I would only be there a few months. I got a job in the fiction department at Los Angeles Public. It was an interesting job. I liked it. You know, a lot of questions that I was very much interested in. The users--they were the spark plugs, but the librarians at L.A. Public were very responsive, so I enjoyed it, but it was brief, just for the summer.

McCreery: Which branch?

Blake: At the main library.

McCreery: I'm curious. Knowing you were there just a short time, did you have much impression of L.A. Public as an institution?

Blake: The impression that I had within that short time was that they were, as I just said, very responsive to the requests of people who were using it, but it had the same lack as I found in all libraries and in library schools: that it didn't reach out to people who weren't using the library, and so the user population was limited, especially by class--it was middle class--and by age. It was young students or young would-be students primarily, and then older people who had always used the library.

I remember the very cold shoulder that was given to homeless people who would try to come in and sit there, and some of them were readers. Being homeless has very little to do with whether you want to read or not. Well, it was made very clear to them that they were not welcome, that they were annoying to or not what the other users wanted around them.

It was all kind of grist for my mill. This is exactly what I thought librarians should be doing. They should be seeking out the unserved and finding out what their information needs were and creating resources for them.

III THE SCHOOL OF LIBRARIANSHIP AT BERKELEY

Coming to Berkeley's Library School, 1971

McCreery: You've mentioned, then, how you approached Berkeley, inquiring about faculty positions here and so on. Maybe you can just fill me in a little bit more on the process of applying and interviewing and coming to Berkeley. Had you been here before?

Blake: Yes, I had been here because I was active in the establishment --I think we talked about it last time--of a universitywide librarians association [LAUC], which had never existed before. So I'd come up to Berkeley and met with my counterparts here at the library, and I liked Berkeley, always liked Berkeley, and I liked some of the colleagues whom I met in the course of our setting up this group. So I already had a notion of what was going on, not so much in the library school as in the library, but I had had contact with the library school, too. You know, publishing articles would elicit response, and other articles, and so on. So I had correspondence or communication with librarians here on campus. It was kind of my kind of place. I like Berkeley.

McCreery: I know Pat [Patrick G.] Wilson was dean at that time and was the one to hire you. Do you recall the circumstances of your interview?

Blake: Yes, I certainly do. We made an appointment, and I came up here. I went to his office. We had a long talk together. He asked, as he would, very pertinent questions. It was soon clear that I was going to try to move in another direction, and he had already begun that. When the Free Speech Movement started here--he thought maybe the library should do this, but they weren't taking it up, but what the library school should be would be an information resource for the Free Speech Movement. Students should be able to come to librarians and

get the kind of information that they needed for what they were trying to do.

So he set it up that there was actually a telephone number that people could call, there were people who boned up on some of the information that they would need or some of the reference materials that they would need for their meetings with the faculty and meetings with the Regents and so on. I was elated because I thought that was exactly the way a library school should go. So we talked about that quite a bit.

[tape interruption for telephone]

Blake: Then Pat said that he would take me around and introduce me to all the other faculty members. He gave me a brief description, but a very cogent description, of each of the people to kind of prepare me. He didn't put anything into my mouth, but to prepare me for the kind of questions I might get and the kind of reactions I might get. There were obviously some people on the faculty who didn't want me under any circumstances [laughs], who thought I was death to their idea of the library school. And there were some people on the faculty who were very welcoming. So his preparation--he went carefully through each one and what he thought might happen, but not what my response should be. He left that to me. He would. Pat Wilson would.

So he took me around to each of them. [J.] Periam Danton was very distant, but not rude or anything. Bob Harlan, of course, was--it was old friends getting together. Mae [Durham] Roger--did you ever meet her?

McCreery: No, I didn't.

Blake: She was doing children's librarianship. She was cold. I knew that part of the coldness on the part of a number of them was the result of--what was his name? Stieg. Dr. [Lewis F.] Stieg. I had met him--he was the head of the library at USC when I was there. His daughter, who was a librarian, Margaret [F.] Stieg, was applying for the same opening on the faculty.

So I had been forewarned, and I knew that we were kind of rivals for the job, that some people would be her supporters, which was their right, of course. They knew her because she had taught one summer school course, or maybe more than one, but one that I knew of. I could sense that there were some icebergs between us. But under Pat Wilson's guidance--he said, "Just be yourself. Tell them what you think a library school

is for. If they say no, that's it." So I guess it worked out because then I got an offer of a job.

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McCreery: Well, I know Pat Wilson had only been dean for about a year himself at that time. He had inherited a faculty not only split up among different generations but coming from very different backgrounds. Did you have much of a sense of that array of different viewpoints at the time you were interviewing?

Blake: No, just what I told you, that I knew that there was a group that were not very welcoming of me, maybe not even having much to do with me because of the circumstances. But as soon as I got to faculty meetings, it was so evident that there was this chasm. I thought Pat Wilson did a wonderful job of keeping very different groups together and working for the benefit of the library school. I know I could never have done anything like that. I guess that's what administrators are supposed to do, so it was proof once again that I was no administrator [laughs].

Appointment Status for Women

McCreery: Right. Now you say you got the offer of employment, and we touched briefly before--it may have been off the tape--on the subject of your title; that is, lecturer. Talk to me a little bit about how these decisions were discussed and arrived at.

Blake: Well, they were never discussed with the people who were applying. They were discussed behind your back at some faculty meeting, but it was evident that all the women were lecturers, and the only people hired as professors were men. There were some holdovers from way back. Like, I think Grete [W.] Frugé [Cubie], who taught cataloging--she had either been appointed as a professor or finally got to be a professor; I don't know what the history of that was.¹ But women came on as lecturers.

For me, I guess the one difference was that I had all the educational qualifications--I had the Ph.D., and I had other degrees and other courses I had taken--so I had the educational

¹Grete W. (Frugé) Cubie retired in 1975 at the rank of Senior Lecturer with Security of Employment.

qualifications, which not all the women who were on the faculty at that point had. But it was evident that I was not aiming for the same academic aims as other faculty members. I wasn't interested in writing for academic publications. I was not interested in research per se; I was interested in the library and the library school as an instrument of change in the profession.

Pat made it very clear that that was the reason I was being hired as a lecturer, rather than a professor. I wasn't looking for titles. I would have liked some of the perks that went along with professorship, but as it turned out in the long run I got them anyway. I finally became senior lecturer with security of employment, so I couldn't be--

The other women--many of them were working semester by semester. They never knew whether they'd be rehired for the following semester, and some of them were actually being put in opposition to each other. They were competing against each other for which would be better for this class or that class. Once having made it clear that I would teach whatever courses I was assigned to, but that I was interested in establishing some new ones, then I was not in competition with anybody else; nobody else wanted to teach those courses that I wanted and did succeed, often, in establishing.

Developing New Courses

McCreery: Tell me about some of your own courses, how they developed.

Blake: I made myself a little list here of ones that I'm especially interested in, or maybe even proud of. One of the courses that I thought was desperately needed was a course in the library and literacy, that the public library should establish a regular program of literacy classes for adults, within the library and sponsored by the library. That's one of the things that Oakland Public Library really has done. Very few libraries had any interest or concern with that at that point.

So I established a course on public libraries and literacy, and invited people who had been long involved in the literacy question to come talk to the class, to illustrate what they were trying to do, what kind of materials they used, and so on. The people who signed up for it were really interested in it, and I think most of them carried it further as they got positions as librarians after they got their degree.

So that was along the line of what I was concerned with. My real concern was that the library analyze populations, reading--or information populations within the public library's community--that were unserved or poorly served, that they establish what those populations were, what kinds of materials they needed, and begin to set up, organize resources so that they had access to the information that they needed. Very often that was not the traditional material that the public library collected or could provide references for.

Another course that I set up was a course in popular culture. Now, it can range as widely as you want it to, but that's presumably what the public library was providing, mostly. I would have speakers come. They weren't always librarians; sometimes they were actually the makers of popular culture. But lots of different speakers, who would talk about different genres that the public library was collecting, why these were important or whether they were important, mystery stories and science fiction and the various genres that are endemic in all public libraries.

Then we covered what else there is in popular culture that the public library hasn't even touched. That brought a lot of hot discussion because not all librarians were convinced--they were still trying to stock their shelves with [Leo] Tolstoy and [I. S.] Turgenev, which they should have, but not the lowdown material that is often associated with popular culture.

The other important aspect of this popular culture class was to take on the whole question of censorship, that very often what was left out of public library collections was not there because they were afraid that it would raise a lot of opposition in the community, especially in the middle-class community, which has always been the backbone of the public library.

Sometimes it wasn't even outright censorship, but it amounted to that. I would raise the question, for example: Every library, every public library has a big section devoted to the reference materials that business uses. They have *Wall Street Journal*, they have--and some libraries even have complete branches devoted entirely to the needs of the business community. The Alameda County Public Library system had a special business branch in Oakland. But we never got stuff like the Racing Form or materials that were considered "infra dig," that weren't acceptable--or weren't acceptable within the library--to the business and middle-class community. So a discussion of why not.

Once in this popular culture course I raised the question of should the library have pornography, the public library. It's read a lot. It's used a lot. But the public library doesn't have it. I encouraged the students who were taking the course to explore it, to find out what it is. Some of them had never seen a piece of pornography. I said, "Should the public library subscribe to magazines like *Hustler*?" We subscribed to *Playgirl* or *Playboy* because that's just on the edge and their excuse was that they publish articles by accepted authors. But what's the dividing line, and should it be the dividing line?

I should have been prepared for it, but I wasn't. Some of my students were outraged. At one point, one young man said, "I have a young daughter. I wouldn't want her to see a magazine like *Hustler*," and he walked out of the class. There was a lot of--and it spilled over because I was making them discuss it. I remember once I had assigned papers: pick a population, decide what their need for information is, and come back with a bibliography of the materials that would be useful for these people; but don't limit yourself to just printed materials. What are the organizations in the community they should go to? What are the places where they can find information that isn't inside the *World Encyclopedia*?

There was one young man who picked the gay population in Oakland, and he did a beautiful paper. He had everything. He had gay clubs and gay organizations, as well as printed materials. So when all the papers were turned in, his was far and away the best, and I asked him to stand up before the class and, orally, to tell them what he had been trying for and some of what he found. I got double opposition there. He himself was just devastated, and I finally let him off the hook. He said, "That's outing me," because he himself was gay. I said, "You could have done this whether you were gay or not. This is not a question of being gay; it's a question of using your intelligence and your skill to find materials, to find places." Well, he said no, he didn't want to do that.

So I said, "Would you object if I read some of the things that I thought were real discoveries?" No, he thought that was okay. When I read it, an uproar in the class. Particularly from the men students; the women were very accepting. The men --maybe because it threatened them--I don't know what the reason was, but oh, they thought it was awful. "Why are you giving us this garbage?" So they're obviously not ready to serve a gay population! But it was a start in the direction that I was interested in.

One of the first things that I tried--and this was not so much on censorship--but I said that every library has materials for businessmen but they didn't have materials for unions, for working people.

McCreery: That was a theme you'd already explored for a long time.

Blake: Yes, and I'd written on it and published on it. But it still hadn't been accepted. I threw it out to my classes as an area of unserved population. Then my point was with my classes: "You find the populations that are unserved. I don't know all of them. You find them for me, or for yourselves, or for the libraries, and begin to explore them." They came up with some very interesting papers and very interesting information, again about populations I didn't know were there. A lot of them were about feminism and gays and lesbians and so on, but a lot of them were about minority groups who weren't properly served: Native Americans, Hispanics.

One of my discoveries was that "Hispanic" is too broad a term. Just because you're from the Dominican Republic doesn't mean that you have that much in common with people who are from Colombia or Mexico. So that became evident. But it was moving in the direction that I thought libraries should move.

McCreery: Now, we take for granted today discussions of serving those kinds of populations, but how new was this at that time?

Blake: It was nonexistent. I couldn't find any material on it. I had to make it up myself, and I had to go actually find speakers to come to the class and talk about what they were interested in.

Prisons and Prostitutes: The Field Studies Program

McCreery: How did the students respond to the idea of exploring these new areas?

Blake: In general, it was fantastic. It was marvelous. And that's what led me to the establishment of the field study. I found that instead of trying to get a class all together to teach about minority communities, get the students themselves to decide--I had a lot of suggestions for them because I was busy exploring the whole Bay Area--but get them to find an institution, an organization, anything that was representative of the unserved population they were interested in. Go to work there. Begin to do what they do, and in the course of your

work find out what they need, what kind of information they need, and then go to work to organize it and to make it available to them.

So I found some of the places where they became interns, and they found some of the places where they became interns. Then I began to get calls from people in the community who were involved in these kinds of organizations. One of my prizes was I got a call from Margo St. James, who had just organized the COYOTE, she called it. I forget what it stood for [Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics], but it was COYOTE. She was a former prostitute with whom I had an interview. I would go, actually, to all these places because I wanted to make sure that the situation would be welcoming for students.

She started to tell me about the information needs of prostitutes. She said many of the prostitutes have kids. They get hauled into jail one night, and they have to stay overnight. What happens to the babysitter? How can they take care of their kids? You know, they have arrangements, but how can they get to the people who will take over for the kid?

So I said, "What do you need?" She said, "You know, we need one central place"--they're allowed one telephone call. Let them make the telephone call to a central place where all this information is on file, and if Mary calls in and says, "My kids are supposed to be picked up by this babysitter and she doesn't know that I'm in jail," that that would be done; somebody would be assigned to do that.

McCreery: Sort of a clearinghouse?

Blake: Yes. And that's information. That's what librarians are supposed to do: collect, organize information and make it available. So I think I had two students who took that on.

I had a student who came to me and said--two students, who said they were interested in the Black Panthers, who had just organized this school for preschool kids, and they served breakfast every morning. What was Cleaver's name, Kathleen?

Newman: Yes.

Blake: Kathleen Cleaver was the head of it. So I called and talked to Kathleen Cleaver, and she said, "Yeah, we have all kinds of information." You know, it's preschool. How does a parent register a kid? So that was one of the internships. What the students got was, first of all, a real hands-on experience in how you organize appropriate information: how you find it and

how you organize it and deliver it. They got credit. This was the course.

Some of them took internships straight through their year or year and a half or two years, however long they spent at the library school. So that really brought fruition, really brought reality to what I thought library schools should be about.

Were you thinking of some other example?

McCreery: I've heard of one which was about setting up a library in a prison?

Blake: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. This was San Quentin [State Prison, California]. I had long interviews with the administration at San Quentin. I told them about the need for setting up libraries for the prisoners, and they were interested but wary, you know. All these prison lawyers who would be pleading all kinds of cases. I said, "Well, that's not all that prisoners need. Prisoners need access to all kinds of information. I have students who are ready to work, to set up these prison libraries."

I had a number of students--this went on for several years. They took over from each other. One poor student, poor guy, he came one day and he said, "You know what happened to me yesterday at San Quentin? I got locked in!"--because there was a lock-up over some fracas there, and he was just going in, and he was caught with bars on either side of him. Good experience!

I also set up an internship at the San Francisco city and county jail. I had a number of students working there. You know David Christiano was going to work there. That was an eye opener for me because I had meetings with--the sheriff [of San Francisco] at that time was--what was his name? I've forgotten his name, but he's a well-known guy around. I had a meeting with him. Carol [Ruth] Silver was the attorney for the sheriff's department, so I had meetings with both of them, telling them what we wanted to do, what to set up. They insisted on their right to censor certain things they couldn't have, so I said, "Well, tell me what you're particularly concerned about." And they said, "Well, the two things are we don't want anything about karate"--and I was willing to grant them that! "And we don't want pornography." So I finally said, "Look, I'll make a bargain with you. You will not censor anything that the San Francisco Public Library has. If they

can acquire it and distribute it, then the jail library can, too." So they agreed. So that was a good thing to start with.

The one thing they got so concerned about--I remember Carol Silver having kittens over--"Well, you know, they're going to destroy the material." So I said, "Look, the library isn't about preserving materials. That kind of a library is not about preserving materials. So they destroy it. Okay, so you slap them on the wrist and you say, 'Don't do that,' and you replace it." They said, "Well, you know, they're going to steal it and they're going to throw it into the toilet." And I said, "Steal it?! Where are they going to go? They're behind bars! [laughs] You've got a key. They don't."

McCreery: Were her fears realized, do you know?

Blake: No. I think they had one case where somebody threw a book into the toilet. You know, that kind of thing. But no, that wasn't it. We got some surprises the other way, though. One of my very fine students who took an internship there, a young black woman, said to me, "I had the surprise of my life yesterday. I went around to each of the cells, and I asked them what kind of material they want. One of the inmates said he would love to have materials about art." She said, "Oh, you mean, like, how to draw and cartoons?" He said, "No, like *Lives of the Artists* by [Giorgio] Vasari." That's what she said. "Oh, my goodness!" But it shows the stereotypes that we have in our head.

McCreery: Yes. You mentioned San Francisco Public--you were going to have standards in the jail the same as theirs in terms of materials and so on. Did you ever have occasion to work with them or to associate with them on these programs?

Blake: Yes. As a matter of fact, that was the whole idea, that we'd set up a model for them and that San Francisco Public would then take over and provide service to the San Francisco city and county jail. Which they did. They set up a program. I don't know if it still exists, but at that time we worked together, and they realized that that was an unserved population that they ought to be serving.

McCreery: How well did that work?

Blake: Quite well. It worked even better when we just had student interns there because the public library has an elaborate apparatus for acquiring materials, for providing reference work, so it worked very well for several years that I know of.

All right. What other internships? There were more prosaic internships, too. I was very happy to have students do internships with community college libraries, with children's libraries--there's a very good children's librarian at Berkeley Public, and she took on a lot of our students, who were especially interested in services to children. That was an example. The library school had Mae Roger, who taught what books you should and shouldn't get for children. But there was no other concern about what services to children should be. The internships helped to develop awareness on the needs.

McCreery: Were there any settings where the internships did not succeed so well?

Blake: Yes. Oh, yes. Morton's reminding me. We set up an internship with the Data Center in Oakland. That provides all kinds of political and economic information to a variety of scholars, government people, local government, and so on.

Newman: Trade unions.

Blake: Trade unions, yes. As a matter of fact, one of the students who worked with them as an intern later went to Guatemala and served with the public library system in Guatemala to set up a reference there. She was bilingual and interested in that, so that was one of the successes.

But we had failures, too. I told you about the Black Panthers. Ultimately, that was a failure because I think I had one black student who was an intern, and that was okay, but when the white students came, they [the Black Panthers] were so cold and they were so abrasive that it just didn't work.

One of the worst cases I had was at a local community college, where one day the head--it worked quite well for a year or so, and the head of the--he wasn't the president of the community college, but he was some administrator there. Said he wanted to see me, so I went over to see him. He talked around it for quite a while, but I quickly got the idea. He wanted to be paid for accepting the intern.

So I said, "Well, you know, first of all we don't have any budget for that, but beyond that, even if we had a budget, I wouldn't agree to it because you're getting the benefit of their work. You know, you get a whole semester where they work for free for you. Why should you be paid?" "Well, we're using our time and our"--I said, "Well, talk to the librarians who work with these interns. They're delighted to have them." He said, "No. You know, you really should explore that." So I

said, "No, I'm not going to explore it, and don't expect it. If you make that a condition, then we'll just remove the internship." So we did.

McCreery: Oh. Well, that's quite an unusual take on it, isn't it?

Blake: Yes, that was very unusual.

McCreery: Now, at any point did you have trouble selling these ideas and these programs to the library school itself?

Blake: Well, I never had any trouble with Pat Wilson, and since I was the only one who was doing it, and since I didn't ask him for money for it or for additional personnel or anything, what kind of trouble could they make?

McCreery: And you had plenty of interested students?

Blake: Plenty of interested students, every semester. There was never a semester that I didn't have, actually, more internships than I could really easily handle, but we managed.

McCreery: Do you know if any other library school had done anything like that at that time?

Blake: Not that I'm aware of. There may have been, but I don't know. At the most, it would have been placing a student in the university library. I think they may have done that.

McCreery: A regular kind of internship.

Blake: Yes. But I don't think there were any of these--well, they are kind of scary. I was kind of scared by them, too. How do you check, for example, on whether--I had regular meetings with the students, and also I would go personally to see what the situation was, what the conditions were, and so on. But what are your standards? You know, they differ for each internship.

The Data Center--so the toilets weren't state-of-the-art, but is that a situation that you should take into account?

McCreery: So you had to evaluate each setting and think of the student's welfare, of course.

Blake: Yes, yes. That was primary, and I made that clear in the first interview, that it was not to provide them with free labor; it was to provide the student with an educational experience. Most of them understood this and worked very effectively and gladly on that. But I did a lot of checking up. I had the

students come and meet with me--my office hours were always endless--to tell me realistically what they were experiencing, whether they were learning. If they were not, I could move them out.

Deanship of Patrick Wilson; Creating a Niche on the Faculty

[Interview 5: March 9, 2000] ##

McCreery: Last time we talked about some of your teaching at the library school. I'd like to start off today asking you to talk about some of the other courses that you taught, aside from the Library and Literacy, and Popular Culture.

Blake: And the field studies. We did talk about that. When I came in, the dean, Patrick [G.] Wilson, had instituted with the rest of the faculty a new approach to the entering student, kind of an overall course. Instead of chopping it up into cataloging and reference and all the traditional aspects of library school education, he had an introductory course which dealt with all of the usual things--with cataloging and reference and the other things that library schools had always taught--but brought them together so that there would be a feeling that they related to each other. In the past, including in my own library school education, you took your reference courses and you took your cataloging courses and they never had anything to do with each other. Cataloging was off in a separate world.

Dr. Wilson's idea was what I think was a very good one, that librarianship, if it's a profession, has to have some kind of cohesiveness, so that each of us had to be prepared to teach aspects of all of the different areas that are included in the so-called profession of librarianship. That was a course that I really enjoyed teaching because first of all, it meant I had to hone my own skills in aspects of librarianship that I really had never done. I never did cataloging professionally, and I hadn't paid much attention to it, except as a user, since I had left my own library school education. So I had to pick up some of that.

Reference, which I felt was kind of central to the profession of librarianship, was an interesting thing to present to brand-new people who didn't know what the profession was about, really, and, from my point of view, make them see it as an integral and central part of librarianship.

We also, during the course, would discuss aspects of the library as part of the community, which of course was a major interest of mine, and to try to make it all into a unified whole. I enjoyed teaching that course very much. I doubt if it continued for too long, but that was, I thought, a good way to introduce people to what we hoped would become their profession. That was one.

The other courses that I taught were "The Library in the Community," and that was kind of down my alley because it meant that I could send the students, or take them, into the community to see the relationship of the library to the community, if you could find it [laughs]. It wasn't always true, that it was part of it. I remember going with my students to various branches in San Francisco and Oakland and to community organizations.

I remember arranging a meeting with my class with the then-mayor of Oakland, Lionel Wilson. It was kind of a two-sided highway because to the mayor of a city, the library was just something he knew was there, but I don't think he'd ever set foot into it, and this gave him a feeling that it had something to do with being the mayor of a city.

I arranged meetings with organizations within the community, with departments within the community in Berkeley and Oakland and San Francisco and throughout the Bay Area. That was another course that I enjoyed presenting to students and having them come back with their versions of how a library can reflect a community and change a community, develop a community.

And then the reference course, which to me meant more than just teaching students what reference resources already existed--you know, the almanac and the encyclopedia and the dictionary and so on. Of course, that was included in the reference course, but I also felt that there were resources there that librarians should be aware of that are not considered as the conventional reference sources.

One example that I remember from the reference course was taking a word or a concept or a person that I knew would be controversial. I remember one semester I took the Native American leader, Geronimo, and I said, "Now, find as many sources as you can which deal with Geronimo: encyclopedias, look in dictionaries, biographical dictionaries. Look wherever you think there'd be a mention of Geronimo, and come back with, first, unusual places where you wouldn't have expected him to be, where he is; places where you would have expected him to

be, where he isn't; and then what they had to say about Geronimo.

I remember there was quite a bit of excitement in the class when the students came back with this because they found everything from "he was a no-good bastard who was threatening the security of the American pioneers who were going into new land," to "a clever leader of his people for a purpose." It was quite amazing, even to me. I hadn't found some of these resources myself and was amazed at how varied the entries were for one person, Geronimo. How different could he be? But he apparently was.

So it was to teach what I hoped would come across, that a reference resource always has a point of view and that it may be very good, within that point of view, but one reference resource will not give you the whole picture.

McCreery: I wonder what you think was your niche on the faculty in light of the kinds of interests that you had.

Blake: You can probably do better at this than I can. I always thought that Patrick Wilson, who's a very astute human being, hired me because he thought I could be--what was that?--at one speaking engagement I was introduced as, "And now I introduce Fay Blake, the noted barn burner." And I think maybe Patrick Wilson thought I was going to be the barn burner in the school.

McCreery: Were you?

Blake: Well, I didn't burn any barns. Really and truly, I swear to you I never burned a barn in my life. But I think I didn't go over too well with most of the faculty, even those with whom I was friendly. It wasn't constant enmity or anything of that kind, but I think I did go over with a portion of the students. I think they began to see that it was possible to have a different approach to librarianship. That, I think, was meant to be my role there.

Views of Students

McCreery: It certainly was a time for students to be interested in new ways of thinking about things. Now, to turn that around, I wonder what did you think of your students?

Blake: I would say that the twenty years or so I was connected with the school were the most exciting, to me, of any job I'd ever have. Of course, lots of my jobs were just humdrum; they were just to make a living. And this one could have been just that. If I were teaching in some other library school or if I were teaching with some other deans, I suppose my wings would have been clipped. But since I was given my head, I found my students--I would suggest to them. They would take it and run with it far beyond anything that I myself knew or did or expected from them. They were a joy. Those I agreed with, those I disagreed with, those who fought with me about subject matter, and those who took the subject matter and expanded it: all of them were exciting and made my life interesting.

Until. Until the last two years of my teaching. Two things happened to me. One was that the chancellor or somebody called me and said they were setting up special classes for undergraduates--we had never taught undergraduates in the library school. He'd heard about the way I was teaching, and he was asking me to take one semester with a class of undergraduates who would be carefully chosen, top-of-the-mark students with the best grades.

It was a freshman class, an incoming freshman class, and that I'd be free to teach anything I was inclined to, and that it would be a chance, he felt--and he was right--that lots of freshmen never saw a real faculty member. You know, they saw graduate students or something--at that time, it was just beginning, the idea of sitting in a classroom and watching a videotape and that was the idea of how you teach a class.

So I reluctantly--because I wasn't sure whether I was too old to be a teacher of a freshman class--but reluctantly I agreed. I took popular culture as what I would teach. Mort used to meet me outside at the end of each class so we could go home together. You tell her what generally happened.

Newman: Well, it was sort of a declining curve: her enthusiasm and her report of the actual content of the thinking.

Blake: First of all, I never really felt I connected with these students. I was living in a different world from them. That's what I meant by I was too old to be teaching a freshman class. The kinds of things that I considered popular culture, they had only contempt for. They'd gone into a different sphere, I think. I didn't have contempt for the kinds of things they were interested in, but I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know anything about hip-hop music. But I was perfectly willing and made it clear that they could do their work during

that semester and their final paper on whatever aspect of popular culture *they* were interested in, that I wasn't imposing my idea.

But I would bring people to class, guest speakers, who would talk about things that were popular culture to me. The students were bored out of their skin. They couldn't care less about these aspects of popular culture. I realized that what had happened was a real generation gap.

Also, I was terribly unhappy with how little they knew. That really upset me because I would--well, shall I use my favorite example? One of my students--she had not been admitted to the class, but she came into my office, and she begged and she pleaded and she said, "I need the credits. Will you let me in?" So I said, okay, what's one more student? So she gets into the class, and in the first session I described to them what I would expect from them and what I had planned for the course.

What I expected from them was to choose a subject, an area of popular culture that they were interested in, and at the end of the semester they would present a research paper on what they were interested in. I expected them to attend the class, too, but I never required absolute attendance because that was really their choice. Well, she told me she was interested in some current aspect of popular music. I think it was hip-hop or something like that. I said, "Fine, that'd be good." And she disappeared. I never saw her again.

See, I had said you had to appear sometimes, either in the class or in my office, to tell me what progress you're making. Never saw her again. Towards the end of the semester, some weeks later, she finally showed up in class, and I asked her, as I did all the others, "What have you been doing? And how are you doing on this subject?" She said, "Well, I have to tell you: I can't find very much on it."

I had warned her that it was such a new area that in the regular areas she might not find what she wanted. I had told her places where she might be able to find material. So I said, "Well, where did you look? What did you do?" She said, "Well, I looked around at the magazines we have in my house, in the living room, and I couldn't find anything." "And what else did you do?" Well, what else? She looked startled. I said, "Well, you have to go to the library." She looked at me. She said, "The library?!"

Newman: [laughs]

Blake: So I said, "You know, you've just failed the course. You'd better withdraw while you still have time, take an incomplete because you're not going to pass this course." By this time, it was close to the end of--that's an example. All right, so that was one thing. Among the undergraduates--I found they--it's probably my failure, that I couldn't connect with them.

Changes in Students Prompt Thoughts of Early Retirement

Blake: Then, with my own graduate students, it began to be apparent that I wasn't connecting with them, either. I had made it a practice at the first session each year, as we started--in September, October, whenever it was--I would ask the new people who'd come into the classroom what they had read in the last six months that wasn't for an assignment, that was for themselves, because I was interested in what they were concerned with. I always got the most exciting and interesting things.

I still remember this one year--this was early on, in the early seventies--one of the students told me that she was interested in Anasazi [Pueblo Indian culture], and I'd never heard of Anasazi. I asked her to explain a little, and it got so exciting, all this new information that archaeologists were developing on the Anasazi. That was an example of--they came with all kinds of interests that they read about, that they had enough interest in to read about.

In the last two years that I was teaching, I would ask the class, and I'd say, "I don't want to know anything that you've read for an assignment, that somebody makes you read. What do you read for yourself?" I discovered that more than half the class hadn't read anything. They were going to be librarians! I mean, this was still a library school.

One young man actually told me, "I don't know what kind of question that is. It's not a question I want to answer. I'm not here to learn how to read. I'm here to learn how to become a computer analyst." So I said, "Why don't you go to computer school? Why do you come here? This is the library school." He said, "Well, because I couldn't get into computer school, so I figured this would be the next best thing."

Well, what could I teach people like that? What could they learn from me, or what could I learn from them? It was such a dispiriting experience that I retired early, earlier than I

needed to, because I could see it was becoming a very unsatisfactory relationship.

McCreery: Was that the main impetus for your early retirement, would you say?

Blake: I would say so, yes. Yes, I would say that was it. Yes. The answer is yes.

McCreery: Okay. It's very interesting, how you noticed things changing in a relatively short time, the interests of your students and their intentions and that sort of thing.

A Time of Change: Dean Wilson's Tenure

McCreery: Now, you mentioned Professor Wilson, who was of course dean for several years that you were there. Maybe I can just return to the first half of the seventies for a moment and ask you to tell me a little bit about his style as dean and how he worked with the faculty in those years.

Blake: At the beginning, I thought it was an unusual situation for someone like him to be a dean because that was not his area of interest or expertise. He was not essentially an administrator; he was a scholar and he was a teacher. But I could see very soon that he had some new ideas that were interesting, new ways in which administration could change the direction of a school.

For example, it was a period when there was all the uproar on campuses all over, and his response was to say, "Look, we're supposed to be a school of information. Why don't we set ourselves up as a school of information? Let it be known on campus what our several telephone numbers are. People can call for information. We would provide information about the campus, about where to go for your various needs."

I thought that was an exciting way to use, especially, a library school. I thought it was a significant example of Professor Wilson's sense of responsibility as a dean of a library school. I responded to that very positively.

McCreery: I wonder how were these ideas, his new ideas, received by the faculty?

Blake: Do I need to tell you? [laughs]

McCreery: I'd just like your thoughts.

Blake: People would sit, I remember, in faculty meetings--you know, librarians are very polite, so nobody would tell him, "Go to hell," but they would sit with these frozen faces, with no response at all. I remember occasions when some of them would actually get up and stomp out of the room; they wouldn't stay through the end of the meeting because they opposed it so badly. Then, of course, you could look at some of the faces and see that they weren't intending to do this anyway, so they just suffered through a faculty meeting and then went their usual routes, things they'd been doing for twenty years before that.

It's interesting that the best responses to this new way of dealing with library education came from the women on the faculty, none of whom were professors, none of whom were on the tenure track, all of whom were underpaid. They were the ones who responded to this new approach most positively.

McCreery: Why do you think that is?

Blake: I think it's because they'd never had a chance to speak at all. Nobody asked their opinion about the previous way the school was run. So for the first time they had a chance to say, "Yes, I like this" or "Why couldn't we do it this way?" Because Professor Wilson was open to everybody's responses. I think maybe the women on the faculty were younger or, if not younger in years, younger in the teaching business and so it wasn't so ingrained in them that "This is the right way and the only way to do it."

McCreery: Yes, people who start out with that idea would have a hard time letting it go, certainly, in any field.

Blake: It's almost like denying your whole past, you know, that everything you had done was wrong--which wasn't Professor Wilson's intention. He wasn't trying to show them up; he was just trying to move them into a new level or a new way of thinking.

McCreery: Yes, yes. Times were changing, and he was trying to cope with that.

Blake: Yes, he was trying to go with the times.

Deanship of Michael Buckland, From 1976

McCreery: Sure. Now, at the beginning of 1976 Michael [K.] Buckland became dean. I wonder if you can tell me a little bit about what you remember: how did that all come about, and how did you find out?

Blake: I haven't the least recollection. I don't think I was ever consulted. I think it was just an announcement, and there he was. If they ever did announce it, it's just gone out of my memory. He was just the new dean. He and I fought a lot, but in a principled way. He was not so bound to the past as some of the others. He came from another country [England], which might have made a difference. He brought a different aspect of culture with him.

I personally was affronted by--but this had nothing to do with him, with Mr. Buckland; it was what the university was imposing on him, that I suggested maybe it was time for me to get tenure or some aspect of tenure, instead of waiting every semester or the beginning of every year to find out if I was going to be working there at all. He was quite brusque with me--apparently, he was under pressure from above--and said, "Well, take it or leave it. You've already said--we have it on record--that you didn't want to do academic research and submit articles to juried journals, so I can't give you a professorship." I said, "No, not a professorship. That's not what I particularly want anyway, but some kind of security of employment." "No."

Administrator at Cal Poly, 1976-1977

Blake: So I started making applications for other jobs. When I was offered the job at [Cal Poly] Pomona, I came to him and told him that I had been offered the job, and he said, "Well, go ahead. Take it." So I went to the union rep and asked just for advice, and he did a smart thing. He said, "Well, don't quit. Take a leave of absence, and take the other job," which I did. I was very glad because at the end of the year I wanted out of that school and that job. It was an administrative job, and that was not my bag.

So I asked Mr. Buckland about coming back, and he said, "Oh, yes, we'll be glad to have you." When I left, I came back to the school, and this time he began to negotiate and talk

about security of employment. I'd still be a lecturer--first of all, he appointed me, when I came back, as a senior lecturer, and then the offer of security of employment, which was like tenure. It meant admission to the Academic Senate; it meant I could get--what do they call them?--educational leaves and grants and stuff like that. So I suppose it was a good thing that I went for the year, and when I came back it was on a new level.

McCreery: Yes. It does sound like one of those cases where it was effective to go away, even though you may not have intended to come back.

Blake: Well, if I had liked the other job, I would have stayed with it, but I was pretty miserable there, so I was glad to come back.

McCreery: Well, I note you were at Cal Poly from 1976 to '77, so it was fairly early on in Professor Buckland's tenure as dean. Just tell me briefly what you were doing there.

Blake: I was supposed to be in charge of the public services, which sounded like a good idea; it was the kind of thing I wanted to do. It was--well, they called it an academic library, but actually Cal Poly wasn't much interested in academics; they were interested in turning out masses of engineers. The most important activity of the whole year was preparing the floats for the New Year's Day parade. That was everybody's intention.

So I tried to initiate some new ideas, new techniques that would have something to do with public services--you know, getting students interested in the library and getting them to use the library effectively. The only room in the library that was ever, ever used was one room down in the basement where teachers could put on reserve textbooks for their classes, usually that they had written themselves. That was the only place you could get a textbook for free, without paying fifty dollars for it or whatever. So that was used by the students heavily.

I remember I would go upstairs to the stacks, and I would look down the aisles, and not a book was out of place--because nobody ever used it! Not because it was kept in such great order, but because nobody ever went to get a book out of it. It was really a deadly situation for me. I wasn't interested in turning out engineers.

Organizing Summer Symposium at Berkeley ##

McCreery: I'd like to return to one other thing that I think was fairly early in your years teaching at Berkeley. I was told that you, along with Carolyn [Curtis] Mohr organized some kind of summertime symposium to bring people in the greater community and I think from throughout California together to talk about library services, and I gather Willie [L.] Brown, who was then speaker of the [California] Assembly, was part of it. Do you have much memory of what that was all about?

Blake: Well, I remember Carolyn Mohr was one of the women I was talking about on the faculty who was always kept on tenterhooks and was never regarded as an equal but who brought lots of new ideas. She and I soon found ourselves on the same wavelength. As a matter of fact, she and her husband and Mort and I are still friends and still occasionally have breakfast together. Neither of them is very well, but when we can, we do communicate. It's not looking back to the past; we find interests in today's world.

As a matter of fact, her oldest son made an eightieth birthday party for her. He reminded me that when I first came, he was sixteen years old. I remember once coming to their house, and he was desperate. This sixteen-year-old had to get to wherever he was going within a short time, and he didn't know how to do it. His mother's car was out of service or something. So I gave him the keys and said, "Well, take my car, but be careful." He said he never--and this was so many years later. He's now a physician and a researcher, and he still remembered. "You trusted me with your car, and I have never forgotten that." That was a close relationship.

Carolyn and I were always interested in the same thing: in getting the community involved and getting librarians involved in the community. I remember Jessica Mitford was one of the people whom we were in touch with and Willie Brown. There were some other people from Sacramento; I can't think of them offhand. But it was a great, lively experience to move the library school closer to the community and the community closer to the library school.

I think it was just one summer. At least I was involved with it just one summer. It may have gone on other years, but that was a good example of the kind of thing that I was interested in, and Carolyn was a good ally.

More on Dean Buckland's Tenure; Changes to Curriculum

- McCreery: Was there anything else you wanted to say about Professor Buckland? I guess I'm wondering how did things change when he became dean?
- Blake: Mr. Buckland was much more interested in what has become of library schools since then. He was already involved with business schools and the development of high-tech--the use of computers and so on. It was a good direction for library schools to go, except that I think he, as well as his allies in the field, were beginning to look with some contempt on libraries, that the way to go was into high-tech, and high-tech meant big business. That was a direction I was not interested in.
- I think it has its place, unfortunately, but it's not my place. The whole question of fees--you know, you can't provide high-tech without charging fees for it. Well, that to me undercuts the whole idea of the public library.
- McCreery: I know one of the first things that happened after Dean Buckland arrived was that the school changed its name to the School of Library and Information Studies.
- Blake: That was the direction it was supposed to be going in.
- McCreery: Yes. Do you remember, was that controversial?
- Blake: There was objection. I for one objected, but a couple of others did, too, to the fact that it was changing the whole emphasis, that information didn't mean what they meant by information services, which meant services to and from big business and therefore the money connection. But it was changed, and it was a straw in the wind, I think, to what it has since become.
- McCreery: Was the change substantive? That is, did it represent real change in the school right away, or was it a change in name only at that time?
- Blake: No, it made some real changes, which I wasn't close to. I wasn't in on the planning of them or the execution of them. Wisely, they still kept some of the old classes and faculty on; otherwise, it would have been much more controversial, I think. But they were beginning to create these changes in which I had no part and really wanted no part. That was not what I thought

library schools, library education, and libraries should be about.

McCreery: So even though the changes may have been gradual, the change of name may have been symbolic that the direction was changing.

Blake: Yes, yes, I believe it was.

Promotion and Security of Employment; LAUC Representation of All UC Librarians

McCreery: You talked about being promoted eventually to senior lecturer with security of employment. I know you had an interest in the issue of salary equity for librarians in general. Can you talk a little bit about how you were involved at Berkeley?

Blake: Most of the time while I was on the faculty, I was trying to involve librarians--this had started when I was still working at UCLA--but I thought librarians should be organized in some way, that it was eminently unfair, particularly for university librarians, to be paid less and to have fewer perks than the faculty, that there should be some kind of equity between the librarians on the campus and the faculty on the campus.

One of the things that I was interested in was that the university librarians organize all the campuses, that they have some kind of communication with each other. They had really been quite separate entities. You know, UCLA didn't talk to Berkeley, and Berkeley didn't talk to Davis or Santa Barbara.

McCreery: You helped start that [Librarians Association of the University of California] while you were in UCLA?

Blake: Yes, and it became a reality. As a matter of fact, I think it still exists. It's still a functioning organization. But I was really interested in university librarians getting faculty status, that they be accepted fully and equally as part of the faculty. I don't think that ever happened. So I worked with university librarians at all the campuses, and we did get the organization, but we never got full faculty status, never got recognition as faculty members. Only the director of the library became a faculty member. Librarians couldn't become members of the Academic Senate. The Academic Senate wasn't interested in having them, either, so it just didn't work.

McCreery: Okay. What other kinds of issues was LAUC working on at that time?

Blake: Let me think. I very soon realized that I could work more effectively in the librarians associations outside of the University, in the California Library Association [CLA] and the American Library Association [ALA], because my status in a librarians organization was always questioned. You know, I wasn't technically a librarian; I was something between a librarian and a faculty member. I don't know what I was!

So I devoted a lot of time and attention to the California Library Association and the American Library Association. I was elected to various offices. At the American Library Association I was elected to the council, which is the ruling body. California Library Association--I forget. I wasn't so much interested in being elected to office as in presenting issues, like the status of librarians; the censorship question, which was always a burning issue and will probably never be resolved; and the relationship of funds and so on for libraries, which was a constant--I mean, you had to fight for them every year.

Appointment to State Library Commission

Blake: While I was involved in this kind of work, while [Edmund G.] Jerry Brown [Jr.] was governor, he appointed me to the [California] State Library Commission. That was an experience!

McCreery: Tell me about that group.

Blake: Well, most of the appointees were political appointees. Most of them had never heard of a library, had no idea what library issues were. They were just there to--I remember while I was there, one of the appointees was the wife of the mayor of some small town out in the [San Joaquin] Valley or somewhere. I think her town didn't even have a library. But it's the mayor's wife. The whole time that she was on, while I was on the commission, you could see on her face that when the discussions would come up, she didn't know what in the world we were talking about. This was completely foreign to her. She was just a fish out of water.

We had some good, rousing meetings. What happened was opposition was developing between the staff of the state library and the commission. One issue that I remember is the

Latino librarians throughout the state felt, and rightly, that they were really getting short shrift, that there were no appointments, there were no directors, there really wasn't much of a place made for Latinos, and Latinos were a growing population.

So on the commission I would work closely with Latino librarians throughout the state and with the one or two who were on the staff of the state library to present to the commission issues that were of particular concern to them and to their communities. A lot of controversy over that, a lot of racism, and a lot of contempt for--"What do they know? They never read [past tense] books anyway." I may be wrong, but I have an impression that this mayor's wife was one of the people who said, "They never read books anyway." She didn't know what a book was!

It was contentious, but there was a lot of money involved. We were giving the libraries state money. I remember one of the things that a number of us on the commission were anxious to push through was that people had access to all libraries in their area, not just the library that they belonged to. We tried to get libraries, like county libraries, to make their facilities available to people from anywhere in the Bay Area.

There was a lot of opposition to this, and one library I remember particularly, the Montclair library or the Piedmont library--I don't know, somewhere--a rather wealthy community, that refused to join in this. So we said, "Well, okay, stay out. Don't participate. But neither do you get the grant." We were giving grants so that libraries were able to do this. They wanted the money, but they didn't want to open their facility.

Very contentious. The meetings got to be horrendous, a lot of battles on the floor. It was an interesting, exciting time, but you know that Chinese saying about "don't live in exciting times."

McCreery: How effective was the State Library Commission at making these kinds of changes that you were trying--

Blake: Sometimes it really worked, and the reason it worked was because we had money to distribute. If they wanted the money, they had to do some of these things. They did them reluctantly, and sometimes they overturned them as soon as they had done them, but sometimes it worked. One of the most interesting people on the commission at the time I was on was Ernest [J.] Gaines, the black writer. He's now gone back to

Louisiana; he's living in Louisiana, where he was born and grew up. But he was a published novelist and well esteemed in his profession, and he knew what would be good for the black community. So he and I hatched a few plots together and had lunch together and enjoyed it.

One of the things that was good about the commission was that we got support from Governor Brown, from Jerry Brown. If it really got contentious and we weren't moving, we could get the word to him and he could be helpful to us. His staff members were helpful to us. I've kept a soft spot in my heart --maybe in my head, too!--for Jerry Brown, because he'd done some awful things, too.

Let's see. What else about the commission?

McCreery: Who else was on it at that time?

Blake: I can't remember a single person. There were some librarians. The ones who I thought were really moving in advanced directions were the librarians on the commission. There were about, oh, maybe four of us; businessmen, a half a dozen of those; and a few political appointees.

McCreery: What was the relationship between the commission and the state library itself?

Blake: The state library was our organ. When we decided something should be done, the state library did it. The staff was pretty--they were good; they were intelligent people, and they were librarians, but they were like administrators, you know? They got in the way of change. That was frightening to most of them. You know, this was before the time of Kevin Starr as the state librarian. They were a tight-knit group who tried to--not who tried, who put obstacles in the path of the commission, but mostly because change was scary.

I think I told you Kevin Starr was one of my students, and he has made a difference, I think. I haven't been close to the state library, but we still communicate once in a while. He sees change as not threatening but exciting, so I think that's an improvement.

McCreery: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit more about the staff of the state library, though, at the time you were on the commission?

Blake: Oh, the state librarian, God help us, was that woman--she was the librarian, the head of a community college library. I think I've deliberately forgotten her name. I don't want to

remember, because I remember once at an American Library Association meeting just after Proposition 13 [1978 election in California] was passed, I was an invited speaker, and I spoke about what Proposition 13 would do to libraries in the state. She was at the meeting. Ethel Crockett, I think her name was.

She was at the meeting, and she came to me afterwards and gave me what for. It was an out-and-out public quarrel because she said, "How dare you say what Proposition 13 would do? First of all, it won't do what you're saying, and secondly, you have no right to make political comments at an ALA meeting." I said, "I have the right to make them if it's going to destroy libraries, and it will," and it has. You know, it was a real catastrophe to public libraries. But here was the state librarian arguing with me that I had no right to speak against a proposition that had been "passed, the will of the people."

Effects of Proposition 13; Lasting Shadow of McCarthyism

McCreery: I wanted to ask you about Proposition 13. How much was the library community concerned about it before it passed--was there much awareness about what the effects would be?

Blake: I think the librarians were concerned, but they didn't do anything. They were constrained about political action of any kind. I fought with a lot of librarians about the need to speak out and to come to ALA and CLA and make other librarians aware of what this was going to do to schools and libraries and public institutions of all kinds in this state.

But a lot of librarians were burned during the McCarthy period. The record of librarians during that period was very good--they spoke out, they stood in opposition to it, and they got fired by the dozens. And so it scared them. That was the effect of McCarthyism: it made people frightened to speak out, especially those who were in public positions of any kind.

So there was very little--I mean, the ALA and the CLA never passed anything, not even resolutions (for all the good they do), but not even resolutions against Prop 13 because they didn't take political stances.

McCreery: That was a policy of the organization?

Blake: Mostly, yes. I don't know how formal and official it was.

McCreery: But you're talking about the chilling effect of the earlier censorship controversy.

Blake: Yes. So librarians would--I remember once, at a meeting of the American Library Association commission or committee or whatever it was, on censorship, where the staff member who was advising the group--I was elected to it--was telling us, "Well, my idea about censorship is if a community is against a certain book, you take it off the shelf, but slowly." That was when there was a big fuss over *Huckleberry Finn* [by Mark Twain]. You know, you take a long time to reach the book on the shelf, and you take it off slowly. In other words, you do some stalling action, but you don't speak out publicly. That was kind of representative of attitudes toward censorship.

McCreery: How effective was ALA in playing its advocacy role, even though it didn't take political-type stances?

Blake: Well, they overturned some of the new--the period in the seventies, when I was active in it, and maybe a little into the eighties--you know, when people began to be elected to the council and to the presidency of ALA, like me. Ten years before, I would never have been elected to the council. But they got a couple of very good presidents, like Eric Moon and Clara Jones, who began to work and were often successful--that library associations *should* take public stances and political stances, and there was a lot more discussion and action, despite opposition, but it opened up quite a bit by the seventies.

California Library Association and Proposition 13

McCreery: Let's talk for a moment about CLA, the California Library Association.

Blake: Well, that was even more tight-lipped than the ALA! Most of the people who were active in CLA when I came into it were administrators, library directors and deputy directors, people like that. Most librarians went once a year to the annual meeting because it was fun, because they got time off, but were not really taking much action.

But it began to change, again, in the sixties and seventies, when people began to demand that it speak for librarians and for library issues. So the fight against censorship became more open, and advocacy became more

acceptable. It was a period of more effectiveness. I think it's been turned back. I doubt if they even reach slowly for a book. But I haven't been connected with it for some time.

McCreery: Who were the movers and shakers, though, during your time within CLA, who were trying to make changes?

Blake: Oh, dear. I can't remember anybody's name.

McCreery: Okay. Well, that's all right. I just wondered if anything stands out, because was it a CLA meeting that you were once introduced as a noted barn burner?

Blake: Yes, but that was not in California. I had been invited to--it wasn't CLA; it was an ALA meeting someplace out of the state. I think it was in maybe Nevada or someplace like that. That's where I was introduced as a barn burner. But I don't remember CLA as--when I came into it, it was dead on its feet; it was just a formal organization. There were significant changes in the sixties and especially in the seventies, and some of those changes remain in effect. They were not easily overturned.

McCreery: Okay. Let's return to just finish up about Prop. 13, I wonder what do you think were the effects and to what extent did librarians anticipate them?

Blake: Well, I think we're still seeing the effects. It meant that the concept of everybody contributing towards government funds which would be used for services, especially for those who couldn't afford to pay privately for them--it's still with us. That old concept of a public conscience has gone. I just read yesterday somebody commenting about the elections, saying, "Well, I don't have any kids in elementary school. Why should I be taxed to pay for elementary school?"

McCreery: Rather short-sighted, isn't it?

Blake: So we'll all be surrounded with a bunch of dumbbells who haven't had a public school education.

McCreery: Prop. 13, of course, had an effect on the entire state--not only the whole residential aspect, for the property owners, but, as you say, it affected the whole public conscience. That passed in 1978. I wonder, was that some kind of turning point, in your view, in libraries or the role of libraries in the public sphere?

Blake: Well, once it passed, public libraries, even those that were on the road to public service, were severely constrained because

the funds got so much less. The budgets were cut immediately, and we've seen the results of them: whole areas that have no public library service at all. We used to have the mobile buses going around and providing service in the rural areas, and they were quickly done away with. It became a desert for all public services. The schools, I think, were even more affected, but I know libraries were, public libraries were.

McCreery: Now, were you still on the state commission at that time?

Blake: No, I think I was off. I'm pretty sure I was off.

Research Interest: Women in Detective Novels

McCreery: I wanted to ask you a little bit on another subject. I understand that you took a sabbatical in 1980 to '81 and that you worked on a study of women detectives? I wonder if you could just tell me where that interest came from and what you did about it.

Blake: Well, it came really from the popular culture course that I taught. Usually I invited guest speakers; like, on science fiction--I haven't kept up with the current science fiction; I read science fiction a long time ago--so I would invite people who were experts to speak to the class. But I had been reading detective stories for a number of years, and I figured if I did a little study, I could present it to my popular culture class, which I did each year. It was well received generally, and I began to see a pattern, that almost all the current detective stories, the detectives were always men.

I went back to detective stories of the past, and I discovered that even as far back as the twenties--later I discovered it went back into the nineteenth century--but as far back as the twenties, here and there there would be a woman detective.

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McCreery: You were talking about your interest in women detectives.

Blake: Women detectives. The early women detectives whom I ran across, once I started to look, were freakish women. Invariably, all of them were old maids; they'd never been married, they'd never had any relationship with--it was an

anomaly to have a woman detective, so she became an anomaly, and even in those novels written by women.

So I was interested in exploring this further. Most of those whom I discovered were written by English writers, and it was very hard to get hold of the books because nobody keeps 1920s, 1930s detective stories, especially from England. So I was entitled to a sabbatical. I took it, and I went to London and became a reader at the British Library, where they had everything I wanted. All the books were there.

The service there was absolutely fabulous. I would walk in in the morning; I'd hand them a list of what I wanted; I'd go have a cup of tea in the British Library cafe; I'd come back, and the books were waiting on my desk. It was terrific. So I spent day after day reading these--they were horrible books, most of them, badly written and these freakish characters.

But I could begin to track this pattern. Back as early as the 1890s--no, maybe even before that, but certainly by the 1890s in England, there began to appear a few women protagonists of detective stories who would solve the problems intellectually, by using their brains, not by running around picking up clues.

Agatha Christie's [character] Miss Marple was a good example of a typical one of the twenties and thirties. She's an old maid, she lives in a small town, and she's absolutely proper: goes to church every Sunday and knows the vicar personally. But she observes and draws conclusions from her observations, so she's able to solve mysteries in her small town that the police department is not able to. Although she has good relationships with the police department, some of them regard her as interfering. You know, "This is not a woman's role." But she begins to maybe change the pattern a little.

As a result of the women's suffrage movement, a few women detectives evolve who are professionals, who do it for a living. They start out as something else; they start out as schoolteachers or as secretaries, but they begin to develop a clientele, and they become detectives, the protagonist of detective stories.

Well, it became real fun, and when I got back, I had a store of first-rate research material that I began to turn into papers, which I would either deliver at meetings of the popular culture associations or at mystery writers conferences. It began to be a new and interesting research field for me.

I'm still interested in it, not so much in women detectives as in detectives who use their brains, and that's become more common. It's not that they're--because Hammett, Dashiell Hammett, was an innovator. His detectives used their bodies. They used guns, and they used physical force. But the solution always came back to they figured out intellectually, with their brains, why this was the perpetrator of the crime.

This began to spill over into women detectives, too. They became different. By the--let's see, in the fifties they were still freakish or--by this time, what developed was a couple. They were the wives of--the man would do the detecting, and she would point him towards some clue or something that he should investigate further, and then he would solve it, of course. She never got the credit for it, but she didn't even seek the credit for it.

By the sixties, real women detectives began to emerge, sometimes even professional, not just private eyes who were waitresses who were doing detecting on the side, but people who were on the police force or who were private detectives.

I discovered that it was illegal in Britain--you know, part of my reading at the British [Library]--it was illegal in Britain to appoint a woman to the police force until after World War I. The only position a woman could have would be as a wardress in a woman's prison, but she couldn't be a detective or even a police woman. I got very much interested in following the process here, the changes that were taking place.

It was also interesting--that was my point always, in teaching popular culture--that popular culture reflects what exists in the society. It's always a little late, that it's not until society makes a change that popular culture makes a real change.

McCreery: So it's a follower of actual culture.

Blake: It's a follower, yes.

McCreery: Okay. Well, that sounds like a lot of fun.

Blake: Yes, I enjoyed that a lot. I had a good time.

Other Research and Publishing Interests

McCreery: What were your other research and publishing interests during the years you were teaching here?

Blake: Well, I published fairly widely in the library press. Did I tell you about the first article that I ever had published in the *Library Journal*? Yes, I think I told you about that. It was on public library service to labor, and they thought I was a librarian.

McCreery: Yes, and you were at USC [University of Southern California].

Blake: I was still at SC, yes.

McCreery: Yes, we did talk about that. I enjoyed it.

Blake: So I was always interested in, and published fairly frequently, on censorship, on the library and the community, on unserved populations, areas that libraries should be collecting in and making available to people who before this really hadn't used public libraries.

I once published an article on Frances Newman--who was no relation [to Mort]!--who was a librarian somewhere in the South--Atlanta, I think--and a very unusual one. This was in the twenties. She took a vacation every year, and she had a little hideout in Greenwich Village in New York, and she was a liberated woman. You know, she had affairs, and she kept her library position by separating herself geographically. If she'd tried to do this in the South, she couldn't have succeeded too well. So I did a little study on her, and that was published.

McCreery: May I ask you about one particular thing?

Blake: Sure.

McCreery: This was an article, I believe co-authored with Jane Irby, called "The Selling of the Public Library," which was then anthologized in something called *Library Literature VII: The Best of 1976*.

Blake: Jane was a student of mine, and a very good one. She and I both got interested in the question of fees and privatizing libraries. She was doing a paper for her class on this, and I suggested, "Why don't we do a paper together and submit it for publication?"

McCreery: So you were bringing her along?

Blake: Yes, sure.

McCreery: Wonderful.

Blake: A number of my students. I had a great time. I never pushed them to publish on their own. You know, I'd give them places where I thought they might have placed their articles, things they were writing.

McCreery: Do you remember the response to that particular suggestion?

Blake: To that article? Yes, it was very good. There were letters coming in, and of course there were objections from this rising new idea that libraries ought to be part of the business community, but there were also some very good responses. I think that's why it was chosen for the *Library Literature* anthology.

I remember one story about students publishing that was a surprise, and it was great. I had a Latino student in one of my classes, and he turned in a paper once that was so well written, with style, that when I returned it to him, I asked him to come and talk to me. I said, "You know, you're a very good writer. You should be submitting some writing for publishing." He said, "Oh, that's a nice idea." And then he admitted to me, "Well, you know, I did submit some poetry of mine, and it's being published in an anthology," which was so nice to hear.

But he did send in his article to be published in the--his article was about a library issue, and it was published in a library publication. It was so nice to come across some of these really good, skilled people who were students.

McCreery: Yes, wonderful. Well, I know that you came into librarianship and teaching with very specific ideas about libraries as agents of social change, and you've described how your students were generally enthusiastic about this and that you found a real place for those ideas. I wonder, though, did your own thoughts on that change at all over time?

Blake: Well, changed in the sense that more and more opportunities seemed to--originally I thought, rather narrowly, that a library could connect with an existing community organization or something of that kind. But it became apparent, through my students mostly, that the library could do much more than that and could connect with the whole community, so that became kind

of a basic tenet of what I taught and what I believed, and still believe. I believe we're in a retrograde period just now, but I think maybe we'll pick it up again sometime.

McCreery: So if anything, though, your vista became--

Blake: Broader, much more. I credit my students, mostly, with doing that for me, and I'm grateful to them, to this day.

IV RETIREMENT INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES

Teaching Courses After Retirement

McCreery: Now, you've described how you came to your decision to retire earlier than you would have had to, but I gather you returned to teach some courses for a while after you did retire.

Blake: Yes. After I retired, occasionally the school would call me to teach a course, usually during the summer session. It was always a course in something that I had already either initiated or could follow through on. It was just they were continuing with courses that had developed while I was actively teaching.

McCreery: Well, now, the stated reasons for retiring early--that is, your view that your connection with students was less fulfilling, that sort of thing--how had that come into play when you would come back and teach summer school?

Blake: Well, my summer school classes never gave me the high, the lift, that I had had earlier. But summer school was a possibility, and I still got some rewards from it because it was kind of disconnected from the school as it was during the rest of the year. People were coming to summer school to catch up on something or to repeat something, and it was not under such strict--either surveillance, or it had not yet moved in the direction that I saw the library school was moving.

I don't know why this was so. I could maybe figure out why it was so. But my students in summer school classes were usually older than in the regular classes. Some of them were already in the profession and coming back for a refresher, or were coming late to the profession. So generally the summer school--it was generally successful. But after a while, even that was not giving me much of a reward, so I quit that, too.

Views of Bay Area Public Libraries

McCreery: Okay. Well, knowing of your great interest in public libraries and the principles of public libraries, I think I had mentioned last time that I wanted to ask you about your knowledge of some of the local public library systems and specifically those that are under the civil service system. What effect do you think civil service had on those institutions?

Blake: Well, I have a lot of connections with several of the local public libraries. As I've told you, a lot of my students are in them. In general, I would say--well, I'd say the Berkeley Public Library is a shining example of the library as a center of the community. I think the Berkeley Public Library is under civil service; I'm not sure. I never thought to ask. Or maybe I knew, but I don't anymore. As far as I can tell, if they're civil service, it has given them a chance to expand their activities and to develop the library as a functioning institution. It has not stood in the way of anything they could do.

The Oakland Public Library, I weep for. Like all the Oakland public services, it's suffering. They've been without a director for a year or more. Their staff is, I think, demoralized. They've done some good things. There are some good projects. I think their service to children is very good. But I find them lacking in depth or breadth. They're stumbling. They don't see what their goals should be, nor how to accomplish them.

McCreery: Okay. And is there any way for you to comment on the civil service system, or is it too much a part of a larger--

Blake: Yes, I don't know how specifically it affects libraries as compared to or as a part of public services generally, throughout the community. I know the state library is state civil service. There were times when it was too restrictive. I think maybe my experience on the library commission was--I was fighting not so much particular staff members as the restrictions that civil service maybe put on them. But I don't know how civil service affects the local libraries. I think it's money and staff that they're in need of.

The Closing of Berkeley's Library School; The New SIMS

McCreery: Let's just return for a moment to the library school here at Berkeley. Knowing that you retired in '84, although you did teach some summers after that, I wonder how much you kept up with and what you thought when they decided to close the library school, as you knew it, and reorganize it, of course, subsequently as the School of Information Management and Systems.

Blake: Whatever the hell that means!

McCreery: Your thoughts?

Blake: I have not kept up with them. I never go--I never even set foot inside there because I know very few people there anymore, and it doesn't deal with anything that I'm interested in. Or if I am interested, I want to tear it down, not build it up. Barn burner. I don't mean literally and physically; I've never torn anything down. But I don't approve of their goals. I don't approve of their methods. I don't approve of what they're doing to society, nor what they let the society do to them. So I don't know anything about the school since it changed its name. I was in great opposition to closing the library school and to changing its function, and I said so at the time. Everybody knew quite well that I didn't agree with that! I think it's a step backwards for culture, for education, for people.

McCreery: Now, of course, all around the country many library schools have either closed or been subsumed under other programs, as happened at UCLA, where the library school joined the School of Education. Or schools similar to Berkeley have been transformed into different kinds of graduate schools. I wonder, what do you think this means for society?

Blake: Well, the UCLA experience is kind of interesting because that could be turned into a positive approach. There's nothing wrong with considering a library school as a part of the educational process. I'm afraid that's not what it does. I don't know. I have no contact with the library school down there; I haven't for years. But if it were: "Look, let's make libraries another aspect of education," then it could do some really positive changes in society.

But if it's: "Let's make libraries like all the other institutions, privatized, money-making schemes," then it just-- I think what's happening to our whole society, has happened to

our society, is that we're turning into a fiercely divided society, with a few bright young things on top who play the market and have so much money they don't know what to do with it and who are more concerned with an IPO [initial public offering] than they are with education or culture or anything else. And the mass of society, many more people who are at the bottom, sinking lower, and in the middle, just struggling to be able to breathe.

We saw a little item on the news yesterday about working mothers who are forced to move their kids every day between two or three different daycare centers because their working times are so odd or so informal that no daycare center keeps the hours that they need. So they rush over, put the kid in a daycare center in the morning, pick him up at two o'clock, rush him to another daycare center, pick him up at five o'clock or whatever it is.

We were just talking about this. The first time I went to the Soviet Union was in the 1960s, and it was on a study course with the university in what was then Leningrad. As part of our course they took us to visit various factories in the area, and every factory had a daycare center round the clock, twenty-four hours. Whatever time the mother or the father or both were working, they could be assured that their children were being cared for in the daycare center.

Now, I'm sure it doesn't exist there anymore. It never existed here. But that's an example of the kind of service that maybe we ought to be thinking about. It could even be in a library. There's no reason why pre-kindergarten kids couldn't be in a library center which provides them reading and a snack--well, the things that daycare centers do for kids, and somebody there to read to them.

The Role of Librarians in Society

McCreery: Well, that leads me to ask: what is the proper role of the library in society? What do you think after all these years?

Blake: I still think it needs to develop services, information services for the whole population within its area, and that includes those populations they've never even thought of: pre-kindergarten kids, homeless people--

Newman: Prisoners.

Blake: Prisoners. Anybody in a community needs information, and the library should be the source for that information.

McCreery: How should all this be funded, in your view?

Blake: It should be funded publicly. Those people who own property, those people who can afford it, income taxes--they should pay for all of us, for everything.

McCreery: You just mentioned the example of the Soviet daycare program. I know that you went through many, many years of hope that things would change in that direction here. How is your hope today?

Blake: Well, at the moment, I'm hopeless. At the moment, this latest election, this primary nonsense is a great example to make my spirits fall down. I think we've been one, dumb-ified, that people have been encouraged not to think; you know, even our detectives have stopped being intellectual; they just shoot each other. Secondly, this whole business of making and keeping money and more money and more money--me, me, me--has almost destroyed a sense of public responsibility, public accord, public civilization.

I do think we will come out of it eventually, if we don't destroy the planet with our horrible--one of the things that both of us object to in this high-tech is that it completely ignores what it does to our environment. We've destroyed more than is salvageable anymore, but if we can still save some, maybe we'll come back to a sense of social responsibility.

Collaborating with Mort Newman on a Book

McCreery: Thank you. I would like to ask you also, if you would, to tell me a little bit--the two of you--about the collaboration on your book, *Verbis Non Factis*, which came out in 1984.

Blake: Yes, this was fun.

Newman: Just from conversation to the printed page.

McCreery: Where did the first idea for this come?

Blake: From him. He had been so involved politically that every time we'd experience an election campaign, he'd recognize some motto or something that came out on a flier, that he'd seen it

before. So we decided it would be fun to go look and see previous election campaigns, presidential campaigns. We did find a lot of them that just get picked up years later and are used again, and we found a lot of new ones we hadn't been aware of before.

McCreery: Now, you went right up almost to the present at the time you wrote this.

Blake: At the time we wrote it, in 1980.

McCreery: Up to '80. How did you decide how far back to go?

Newman: Just arbitrarily.

Blake: Well, the first real election campaign with slogans and stuff was in 1800. Before that it was--George Washington was in without having to electioneer and campaign. You were going to say something?

Newman: While the original idea might have been mine, much of the work was done by Fay, particularly in looking up things and researching and doing that.

Blake: That's the advantage of being married to a librarian [laughs]. She knows where to look.

Newman: She did an inordinate amount of the actual work.

Blake: No, no, no. We really worked together, and that's what made it such fun.

Newman: It was a fun project.

McCreery: How was this book received out there in the world?

Newman: We felt that--or at least I felt that--the reception was much too modest in terms of we didn't see it advertised or noted anywhere.

Blake: Yes.

Newman: With any kind of thinking on the part of the publishers--current event magazines, *The Nation*, *National Review*--any of them might have been interested in reviewing it.

Blake: Even if it was to damn it, you know. Well, Scarecrow Press never had enough money for advertising.

Newman: No.

Blake: And they weren't very imaginative about where to advertise.

Newman: They weren't aggressive in that sense of it.

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Newman: There was some reaction, some complimentary sort of things, but on a modest sort of semi-personal scale.

Blake: Yes. The most frequently asked question was, "Where did you find all of these?" Go to library school. You'll learn how to find it.

McCreery: That's a nice symmetry, isn't it? You were not just talking about it, you were--[laughter]

Blake: Doing it.

McCreery: Doing it, yes. Well, at least it's a wonderful reference for anybody who's studying political campaigns.

Blake: Could be, yes.

McCreery: Have you had any information about how the book's being used by others?

Blake: I don't think so.

Newman: Any thank you from the McCain people? [The recent John McCain presidential campaign]

McCreery: On a contemporary note! Nothing yet? Okay.

Blake: It would be of interest to people who, as you said, were studying political campaigns, not to people who are engaged in them. They don't look to the past. That's why we found repeats. Used it one year and then twenty years later, used it again.

McCreery: It was interesting to see which ones were familiar to me just flipping through. Of course, some of them did go way back, and I had no idea they had originated so early on.

"Fifty Years After EPIC" Oral History Project

McCreery: Well, if I may, let me ask you to just talk about one other thing you collaborated on, and that's the "Fifty Years After EPIC [End Poverty in California]" interviews. What was the start of that idea?

Blake: You [Mort] have to talk about that. That's really his idea.

Newman: Well, actually, we went to a social gathering at the home of a good friend of mine, a friend of many years, who happened to be a veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade [in the Spanish Civil War], but that was only in passing, to identify him. And who should show up but other friends, including Claudia Williams and Keith--Keith--

Blake: I don't know.

Newman: They were a team at that time. In the course of the conversation--this would be in about 1983, Claudia said, "Mort, you were active in the Upton Sinclair campaign [for California governor, in 1934], weren't you?" I said, "Yes, I was." She knew it. And she says, "Well, aren't you and Fay going to do something about the fiftieth anniversary coming up?" This was, you know--we were in complete ignorance, not ignorance of the fact, but hadn't thought of doing anything. So then the question: we should, and we will. Then the next question is, "What would be an appropriate thing to do?" I guess just conversationally we came to the conclusion that interviewing as many people--because, you know, there were some deaths that had occurred in fifty years, and more could be expected. So we just decided to get the listings, take people that I knew and take people that Fay knew, and proceed on that basis. We had a lot of fun doing it.

Blake: Was it thirty-five interviews that we did?

Newman: Thirty-five. But, of course, we've talked since. Ours was amateurish.

Blake: Yes, not a professional like you!

Newman: We did the whole thing in the course of a day.

Blake: No! The whole thing? It took us months.

Newman: The whole interview of one person. Usually this would be around some social bit--we'd have lunch together, breakfast

together, and in many cases they were people that I had known and hadn't seen for forty-five or fifty years, so it was a very productive sort of activity for us. Then when we asked--seeing that time was running out and the year was going to be drawing to an end, we asked Claudia to do certain of the interviewing, and she interviewed some of the people in the San Francisco area, which added to that thirty-five.

Blake: Some of them were from the university. We discovered that people like Clark Kerr and--who was the chancellor of the Santa Cruz--the library's named after him.

McCreery: McHenry?

Blake: McHenry, Dean McHenry, and a number of people there had been participants. They were young students at the time, but they had been participants. Dean McHenry agreed to be interviewed, and then he told us he was a roommate of Clark Kerr. He told us about Clark Kerr, but Kerr wouldn't agree to be interviewed.

McCreery: I was going to say, I didn't think I saw Kerr's name on the list.

Blake: No. But, you know, one led to another, and we had some very interesting--Dean McHenry was very interesting.

Newman: McHenry was good.

Blake: He also suggested somebody. He said, "You know, I have a neighbor whose name I'm sure you know, who was involved in the campaign. His name is Robert [A.] Heinlein." And so he said, "But you're going to have trouble getting him." He gave us an address, how to reach him, and we did, and he wrote back and he said, "Thank you but no, thank you. I have decided that I can either write my science fiction books or I can be publicly interviewed, and I decided to limit myself to my science fiction."

Newman: [laughs]

Blake: And then we learned from McHenry that he had turned into an encrusted old reactionary. He was a Republican by this time! So he refused to be interviewed. We interviewed the former lieutenant governor of California [Ellis Patterson], and we interviewed the former congressman, [Horace Jeremiah "Jerry"] Voorhis.

Newman: We had a very interesting interview with him, including the ringing of the telephone at the time we were there.

Blake: The telephone rings. He goes to answer it, and we can hear him saying, "You mean my official baptismal name? Wait a minute. I'll go look it up on my driver's license." He said, "I've never used it." He looks it up, and we can hear him say, "It's Horace Jeremiah Voorhis" or something like that. And he excused himself and he comes back, and I said to him, "You know, this is the first time in my life I've been in the same room with two Horaces, neither of whom ever use the name Horace."

McCreery: Referring to you, Mort. Did you have trouble tracking people down?

Blake: Yes. You know, sometimes it meant, like, jumping from one to the other and finding out from one where somebody had gotten to. One of the big surprises, or a number of surprises were people who were now prominent who had been involved fifty years before in that Upton Sinclair campaign.

McCreery: They were now well known, for whatever reason. Now, you mentioned a couple of people who turned you down. Was that response very common?

Newman: No.

Blake: No, no. Most people were happy to recall better days, times of hope.

McCreery: Were there any surprises in their actual recollections of those events?

Newman: Oh, we never scrutinized them to that--

Blake: Oh, yes. You know, Frank [G.] Taylor. That was a surprise. Frank was Upton Sinclair's campaign manager. We went way out into the--I don't know--

Newman: Boondocks.

Blake: Boondocks--Sonoma or someplace--to find him. He was living on a farm. He told us that at one point during the election--

Newman: After the primaries.

Blake: After the primaries, Upton Sinclair said to him--and he had a committee of twelve, so he called them the Twelve Apostles [laughs]--he said to the Twelve Apostles and Frank, "You know, I can't imagine what I'd do if I were really elected."

Newman: [laughs]

Blake: "I'll tell you what: If I'm elected, I'll resign and you can become the governor."

Newman: This was the first we'd heard of this, and of course people like myself, who were just foot soldiers--we thought that he had, you know, the whole thing completely under control.

McCreery: You were so young then, though.

Blake: Yes.

Newman: Oh, yes.

Blake: He wasn't old enough to vote.

McCreery: I remember hearing that, yes.

Newman: But, you know, this concept that we had, as opposed to the concept of a person who's close to the campaign, who you know, can see the actual--

Blake: The weaknesses, the gaps. But it was funny, too, to hear it from him.

McCreery: Did you get any funding for that project, or how did you manage to pull it off?

Blake: We just did it.

Newman: Just out of our own resources, yes. And, of course, you know, the doing of it was just like a day's trip, and we could see another part of the state or something like that.

Blake: A lot of them were friends we were glad to spend a few hours with, or new acquaintances whom it was fun to work with or interview.

McCreery: Yes. Well, it does tie in with your own interests.

Newman: Shortly thereafter, we did a modest taping, and we did receive a small grant.

Blake: That was the Mahler Institute, but she can't find any record of it at the oral history--

McCreery: That was the Gray Panthers?

Blake: Yes.

McCreery: Yes. So it may be in a different archive. But you've done those two oral history projects.

Newman: Yes.

Blake: And then we did a number of articles on the Upton Sinclair campaign.

McCreery: Yes. In fact, you gave me a copy of one of them. That's valuable material, isn't it, to round up all those people fifty years later and let them really record what they think was going on. That's a good example you're giving about how being in a different part of the circle would give you a much different view of things.

Blake: Oh, there was one other whom we wanted to interview and then couldn't, and that was Gus Hawkins, who was the congressman. But it was because he was in Washington.

Newman: He was in Washington. But he virtually said no.

Blake: He was reluctant anyway. He wasn't anxious to recall.

Newman: See, there were some people--did we interview Sam [Samuel William] Yorty?

Blake: No. We tried to, but he denied any connection. Oh, no. He wasn't--

Newman: I know he was connected.

Blake: They were buddies. But no, he wouldn't have anything to do with it. We didn't get any response from him.

McCreery: Well, you've got to ask, though.

Blake: Yes. Oh, yes.

McCreery: You've got to try.

A Stint as a Political Campaign Director

McCreery: You list political campaign director as one of your jobs on your biographical form.

Blake: As a matter of fact, I just got a letter from--this was the guy who was--

Newman: A really funny letter we got.

Blake: He's a very nice guy. We've been friends for many years.

McCreery: This was the person running for election?

Blake: Yes. Oh, I don't know where the letter is. But his name is Maynard Omerberg, and he was running for the Assembly, in the 63rd Assembly District, which doesn't exist anymore; they redistricted. He's a lawyer, socially active, very active guy. He was a lawyer for the union, the Hollywood union. Anyway, he knew a lot of the people in Hollywood. And he later--this was --when was I his campaign manager? Fifties, forties? I don't know. Forties, I think it was. In the sixties he was very active in the civil rights movement and went to the South with the freedom marchers and served as the lawyer for some of them. Now I'm trying to remember--I lost my train of thought. How did this go?

Newman: We were talking about Maynard--

Blake: Oh, that I was campaign manager. So he was running for Assembly from our district, and he was working with the Progressive Citizens of America at that time, and I was active in that, so they suggested that I be his campaign manager. I was, and it was--he's a fine person, and it was really a lot of fun, and we organized a lot of interesting things in the community.

But one of the interesting things that happened is, we started and he agreed that there was absolutely no chance he could be elected because we didn't have any money; we couldn't --you know. The person who was the Assembly member at that time was a Republican, a dyed-in-the-wool Republican, Gordon McDonough. And he had a political machine. You know, there was no question that he was going to be reelected.

So it was important to us to have a campaign to bring up some of the issues that we knew the incumbent wouldn't. Maynard was perfectly willing to do that. But in the course of the campaign--what happens to all of these people--is he begins to speculate, to think: "Well, maybe if I didn't say that or if I softened that I could be elected." And, you know, I was constantly bringing him down to earth again. "No, even if you could be elected, it would be such a compromise that it would be worthless. So no, you're not going to be elected." He was

good-natured about it. But how strong that becomes as you proceed in a campaign.

McCreery: Yes. Public life has a way of affecting people, shall we say?

Blake: It does, indeed.

McCreery: What did you learn from that experience?

Blake: I learned not to be a campaign manager! It's not my kind of thing. For example, at one point I get a visit, three men--you know, suits--come in, and they're offering to put some money into the campaign. Well, it smells bad to me, and I say, "Why? Why do you want to put money into a campaign like this?" They say, "Well, actually, you know, we're involved with a gambling syndicate, and we're willing to gamble on this candidate. We'll put some money in the campaign if he promises that when he gets elected, he'll present legislation that will be helpful to us." They were from Nevada.

McCreery: I guess that explains it, but it's still very funny.

Blake: So I said, "What makes you think we'd be interested?" "Everybody's interested in money." But I didn't accept the money, and we didn't get any help from them.

McCreery: That's too much! Well, it sounds interesting.

Blake: There were interesting encounters, and it was interesting--some of the people supported, you know, who were sick and tired of this hack political machine--but it didn't get anywhere.

McCreery: Well, I take it you lost.

Blake: Yes, he lost.

McCreery: Was it by the margin that you expected?

Blake: Oh, he lost decisively! He did about what we expected, maybe even a little better than what we expected.

Newman: Twenty, twenty-five percent.

Blake: Yes, something like that. We didn't have high expectations.

Helping to Found Gray Panthers in Berkeley

McCreery: We touched on the Gray Panthers a moment ago, and I gather you two were involved in founding that organization here in Berkeley?

Blake: Not founding it, but just locally. He was more active than I because I was still working, but he was the convener of the local branch.

Newman: I was one of the conveners of the Berkeley branch of the Gray Panthers. I was quite active, that sort of thing.

McCreery: Who else was in on it in the early days?

Blake: Well, it was founded by these two women back east, in Massachusetts, I think. It began with a lot of high expectations, high hopes. Good program. The idea was that seniors needed their own organization but that it should not be in conflict with the needs and demands of the younger generation. So we worked with a number of organizations: women's organizations, children's groups and children's protective groups. I don't remember them too well. I don't remember anything too well!

McCreery: I wouldn't say that! It just seems that you would have a good response to such an organization in a place like Berkeley.

Blake: We did, to start with. But it's foundering. It still exists; we're still members, but it's foundering. You know, people get older, and the younger generation hasn't come into it. They have other concerns or other things they're involved in. So an organization can't exist forever with old-timers. I find that true really generally. What?

Newman: The name of the lieutenant governor, Ellis Patterson.

Blake: Good. See, both of us have that. Our memories are--if we put them on hold for a while, then it comes back. But we don't respond immediately.

McCreery: Luckily, you can collaborate.

Blake: Yes, right.

The Long Collaboration of Fay Blake and Mort Newman; Publishing
"News From Nowhere"

McCreery: You do seem to have a rather collaborative way of life here.

Blake: It's been going on for--sixty years?

Newman: Almost, yes.

Blake: We have a lot of interests in common, and we respond well to each other. Always have. So we've become literally helpmeets.

McCreery: Now, just tell me a little bit, for the tape, about your personal publishing venture, "News from Nowhere," a newsletter which you've done for the last ten years, I know.

Newman: Yes, we've done it for ten--it started just--first of all, the obvious factor in it was its name, which is a steal from William Morris. We simply wanted to do something in this same area. It was very simple. The first copies were, I think, only four pages or eight pages, something like that. The first issue was Number Zero!

Blake: We didn't know if it would continue! The main interest was on William Morris to start with. We admired him a lot, and we were members of the William Morris Society, and we thought it would be a nice--you know, kind of do things about him, in tribute to him. But then it expanded.

Newman: Yes. And then, you know, people picked it up, and people said, "Oh, I give this to my milkman."

Blake: Except we don't have any milkman. In Britain they give it to their milkmen!

Newman: People would say, "I like this." A couple of people said, "I didn't like this."

Blake: Oh, yes. We had good responses, too. Legitimate objections to stuff, yes.

McCreery: The content?

Blake: Changes. Shall I tell her about Kay?

Newman: Yes.

Blake: My favorite story is we have a very good friend, who's a retired biology teacher. She's always been interested in science. When we did the issue on Alfred Russell Wallace, who communicated with Darwin--he came up with a similar idea about the origin of species. She read that issue, and we got a letter from her that said, "Are you trying to imply that Darwin got his idea from Wallace and that Wallace was the real scientist? Hogwash!"

McCreery: No mincing of words.

Blake: No, she was very direct.

McCreery: Well, I take it you relish that kind of feedback?

Blake: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, we enjoy that. We enjoy getting compliments, too. We got a lot of compliments for the Jackie Robinson--we've already gotten back a lot of compliments.

McCreery: The newest issue [with Mort's personal recollections of meeting the young Jackie Robinson].

Blake: Yes. An old friend of his who was a retired Methodist minister told us that he appreciated the article because he had been a good friend of Jackie Robinson's minister, who was a great influence on him.

Newman: They'd gone to Europe together, as a matter of fact.

Blake: Yes. And we got a lot of--it was surprising because we didn't think our readership was especially into baseball. But the audiologist who does Mort's hearing aids--we saw him, and he said, "I received your issue, and let me tell you, I'm a hero to my fourteen-year-old son, who's a baseball nut."

Newman: [The son said] "Did one of your patients really know Jackie Robinson"?

Blake: Jackie Robinson!

McCreery: Now, you're publishing it and giving it away for free. Who do you think you are?! [laughter]

Blake: We always put in a little squib, you know: If you can, we appreciate contributions. And we get them. You know, people send us a check or--

Newman: We get sizeable contributions.

Blake: Yes, yes, there are some good responses to that. But really, we're interested in keeping in touch with old friends, especially as we get older and aren't able to go visit. So that started us on it. It was a way to communicate. And it spread. We have--what?--about two hundred and fifty on the mailing list now, on three continents. One reader will send us an address: Send this to my friend also because I know he or she would be interested.

McCreery: The old word of mouth.

Blake: Yes.

Newman: And then there's a winnowing process in the "In memoriam." They're not all readers, but most of them are former readers. So this just--now we had a couple that we met in London, who were really from Australia, and they were on our list for years, and he died, and--

Blake: I think she did, too. I think we got a letter from her son or something.

Newman: But before she died, we still got the information that receiving it reminded her of her husband too much.

Blake: They were a Quaker couple. We stayed at a Quaker house in London, and they were from Australia. We're not Quakers, but they were, so we had something in common with them. That was very interesting. It lasted quite a while, a number of years, yes.

Volunteering at Berkeley Public Library Bookstore; Last Thoughts on Libraries

McCreery: I know you're still involved with libraries, particularly with Berkeley Public. What are you doing with them now?

Blake: Well, the Friends of the Berkeley Public Library set up a bookstore here, just off Telegraph [Avenue]. We had for many years volunteered--we worked at their annual book sale. Well, the bookstore takes the place of the annual book sale, and so we volunteer once a week. We go to the bookstore and price books or put them on shelves or whatever needs doing there. We're feeling terribly guilty because we go on Tuesdays, and this Tuesday we both had regular appointments with our primary

care doctor at Kaiser [Permanente]. Completely forgot about the bookstore.

It was only the next day that we called and told them why we--well, as a matter of fact, we thought that we might get there, but it got so involved, and he had to have a chest X-ray, and we had to wait for prescriptions, so we spent the whole morning and half the afternoon there.

McCreery: It sounds like you're pretty dedicated to the place.

Blake: Oh, yes. It's a fine--I'm very glad, aren't you, that they started the bookstore.

Newman: Oh, yes. You know, they're interesting people that you're working with.

Blake: And it's busy all the time.

McCreery: Well, what's your advice, Fay, to today's librarians? Any last thoughts about that?

Blake: Oh, dear. You know, I'm so hopeless about the future of the library, the public library, that all I can say is, "Hang in there." If you're young enough, maybe it'll come back. I still think that the essence of librarianship is providing information, especially to those who have been forgotten, who haven't been taken care of. It should always remain the shining star, the gold star that you follow to be a good librarian.

McCreery: Well, let's end there.

Blake: All right.

McCreery: Thank you very much.

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